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A LONELY LITTLE LADY



“HE WROTE SOMETHING ON IT . . . AND GAVE IT BACK TO
HER WITH A SLIGHT BOW.”

A Lonely Little Lady

BY

DOLF WYLLARDE

WITH FIFTY DRAWINGS

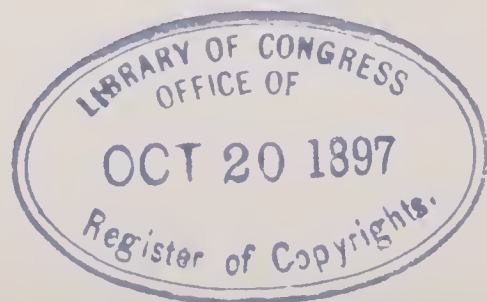


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A Lonely Little Lady



CHAPTER I



THE Brownie's world consisted of a limited circle of intimate acquaintances, beginning with Nurse — a tall, flat body, with a very white cap at the top, and endowed with power to take away the night-light and leave you in the dark — and ending with Papa, a man who lived in a study at the back of the house, and was occasionally helped into an overcoat by the footman, who called him Sir Charles, after which he went out of the front door. The Brownie sometimes wondered what he did outside the hall door, since he had no governess to decree that he should walk in a certain direction; but she knew the footman better than Sir Charles, and there-

fore her thoughts followed the latter into the pantry more frequently than they did her father, whether he vanished out of the hall door or into the study.

Between these two extremes in her sphere of intimacy (she saw Nurse all day and every day, and sometimes a week passed without her coming across Sir Charles), there were a procession of other forms dwindling in importance as they receded from her knowledge. The servants were ranged behind Nurse, — Annie, the under-housemaid, who brought up most of the meals to the nursery; the *chef*, who clapped his fat hands at her and called her “Petite” when Nurse was not in hearing; Thomas Giles, the coachman, with whom she was familiar from the vantage-ground of the nursery window; James and Arnold, the footmen, and Martin, the butler; besides a host of women servants, who came and went until her little head became confused with them. Beyond the servants came Belle and Laura, her step-sisters, whom the Brownie classified thus: —

“Step-sisters — superior beings to oneself, and much more important. Grown up, dressed in silks and beautiful colours. A combination of the angels and fairy princesses.”

Belle was going to be married, — Nurse had discussed it with Annie when she brought up the tray with the Brownie's supper, — and Laura was expected to be engaged very soon : perhaps *he* would come to the point at her sister's wedding. The Brownie looked forward to the wedding as a strange event, which was to have a mysterious influence upon the family — rather like a magic spell.

There were two step-brothers also, but they did not live in the house, and consequently their proper place was amongst the visitors. The shorter of the two sometimes wore a red coat and a sword ; his name was Archibald, and he was chiefly to be distinguished by the fact that he always kissed her when they met — a circumstance which made the Brownie dread his visits. She disliked being kissed by men. The younger brother was so tall and thin that the Brownie had never satisfactorily got to the top of him. He patted her on the head — one degree better than the kissing — and spoke in a far-off tone that frightened her. Then there was a lady even more beautiful than the step-sisters, who was Mamma, and who generally was to be met coming in from a ride with two or three men vis-

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itors, or else floating out to the carriage with the step-sisters and more men visitors. And she also wore beautiful dresses, and sometimes came into the nursery and nodded to the Brownie, and asked Nurse if she had all she wanted, and if the Brownie had any frocks to wear, because she was to come down into the drawing-room at tea-time, and she was to look pretty and picturesque. And then Nurse would suggest the brown velvet, and Mamma would say, "H'm, what was that? Oh, the little Greenaway frock. No, she was tired of seeing the child in that." "The Liberty silk, then?" "No, that was not fresh enough. Oh, well, Mamma was going shopping, and would see if she could get any ideas. Of course the child must be properly dressed—she hated ugly, awkward children. Good-bye, Brownie: I'll see if I can't find something smart for you!" And, kissing her hand, Mamma would depart, leaving the Brownie to return to her story-books or lessons with a heavier heart: she dreaded these visits to the nursery, because it always ended in her having to appear in the drawing-room, generally in a new frock, and she rather disliked clothes she had not worn before.

The drawing-room was an endless vista of strange faces, bewildering in their number and unfamiliarity to the Brownie when Nurse had opened the door for her and left her to enter alone. Half a dozen voices spoke to her one after the other. "You know *me*, Brownie?" "Won't you come and speak to me, dear?" "Oh, Lady Lorraine, what a perfectly sweet frock! and what a darling she looks!" "Quite a little picture, with that old-fashioned style, and her dear little grave face!" "Brownie darling, *do* come here!" And then, before she could reply, as politeness prompted her in spite of her agonising shyness, a worse trouble befell her, and two or three black frock-coats loomed into view, the owners thereof bending down to her solicitously, while languid male voices asked, "Miss Brownie, may n't I get you some tea?"



"KISSING HER HAND,
MAMMA WOULD DEPART."

The Brownie's real names were Hero Lallage

Davanant St. John Lorraine, which was a long list for such a little person, but she was always called the Brownie. She was nearly eight years old, tall for her age, and very slight, though not a thin, overgrown child by any means. She had a soft, curly head of brown hair, which fell round her face and on to her shoulders, and a pale face with large dark brown eyes, and brows and lashes of a lighter shade. The Brownie was convinced in her own mind that she was very ugly, — like one of the imps or elves in her fairy books, — and the compliments which were heaped upon her in the drawing-room were to be traced to her frocks in her own opinion.

Beyond the inner circle, composed of the inmates of the house, the Brownie recognised various outer circles consisting of the most frequent visitors, whose faces and names she could generally remember. There was Lord Bay, who was going to marry Belle, and a certain Hon. Elliot Gifford, who would probably propose to Laura soon, besides two or three others who were always beside Mamma, and held her cup or waited on her; and then the less frequent guests, whom she was in terror lest she should forget and hurt their feelings; and then the mere ac-

quaintances, whom it was hopeless trying to recognise again, and whom the Brownie classed very much with the unknown faces which passed her in the street,—glimpses of an outer world conveyed by endless processions of people at whom she gazed awestruck, as Miss Price, her governess, marched her along, very much after the style of a gaoler.

Miss Price was a thin lady, with a plain, weather-beaten face, and no imagination. She disapproved of the Brownie spending so much time in reading fairy books ; but as Mamma sanctioned it, she merely shut her lips with an appearance of suffering at the sight of the well-worn volumes, and said, “ Well, of course, my dear, as Lady Lorraine gives you the books you are at liberty to read them. But I think it a pity to fill your head with so much nonsense. Poetry, if you like, my dear : every young lady should read poetry ; it is a part of education, and a thorough knowledge of the standard authors is indispensable. But ” — and Miss Price sighed. Mamma only laughed when appealed to on the subject. “ I like her to read about the fairies, — it gives her imagination,” she said. (The Brownie wondered how.) “ And then it is so pretty to hear

her talking about it. She was telling Colonel Howe about ‘Puss-cat-mew’ yesterday, or some beautiful princess or other; and he asked her what she thought the lady was like, and she said, ‘Oh, just like Mamma!’ He came and told me afterwards, he was so delighted. She is much better off reading her fairy-tales, and dreaming over them, than making a noise and spoiling her clothes like most children, Miss Price.”

So the Brownie was left to read Knatchbull-Hugessen and Grimm and Andrew Lang and Mary de Morgan in peace; but in the largeness of her tender heart she stored up two things to remember — first, not to read or talk about fairies until Miss Price had snapped up her black bag and put on her bonnet, and departed until the next morning; and secondly, that Mamma liked her to be fond of her, and to talk of her to her guests, — obviously, as she had been pleased at the comparison to the Princess.

The Brownie had a certain sober affection for Miss Price. She did not love her: it was difficult to love any one whose most effusive speech was, “And now, my dear Hero, I should like to tell you that I am very pleased with your progress this



“IT PLEASED HER WHEN THE
BROWNIE ASKED HER THE
NAMES OF THE DIFFERENT
TREES.”

term, and I think you try to do your best, which gives me much satisfaction," — but she liked Miss Price and tried to show her liking in acceptable ways, by sticking steadily to her lessons, and only taking an interest in instructive subjects when they were out for a walk together. She had discovered that it really made Miss Price unhappy to see her looking (however vainly !) for fairy rings on the dried London grass in the Parks, but it pleased her when the Brownie asked the names of the different trees ; and in consequence, the Brownie, with an honest desire to do as she preferred, dutifully collected specimen leaves from the trees, and dried them, and learned their names, and talked about the different species with Miss Price, — though her whole soul grew sick of botany, and she felt she hated the kindly trees whose romance was all dried out of them, for her, by the science.

Before Miss Price the Brownie had had a resident governess. It was two years ago, but she still remembered the merry, round-faced girl who had romped with her, and sung her songs, and put her to bed, and loved sweets and fairies as much as her pupil. Muriel Erne had been little more than a

child herself when she came to teach the Brownie how to read and write and sew. She was hardly pretty, but she had the grace and joy of extreme youth. A little round face she had, and a mass of fair fluffy hair that would n't keep tidy, and a high sweet voice with a laugh somewhere in it even when she was sad, and she cried sometimes, poor Muriel ! Archibald was more at home in those days ; at least he seemed to the Brownie to be oftener in the house. He came into the schoolroom at times, and used to say he was going to do lessons, and draw on her slate. He could sketch beautifully, and he drew pictures of Miss Erne. But Muriel used to look unhappy and frightened, and ask him to go away in a hesitating manner, for she was very shy, —as shy as the Brownie. And he would n't go, but used to sit and look at Muriel until she drooped her head and could n't look at him ; and then the Brownie's gentle spirit was roused at her friend being teased, and she became quite angry with Archie. It went on for six months, off and on, and then for some quite plausible reason Muriel went away and never came back, and Nurse taught the Brownie until Miss Price was installed in

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Muriel's place. It was all quite quiet and pleasant, and nobody was blamed, and there was nothing further said; but, somehow, the Brownie always felt that in some curious fashion Archie had been



“HE COULD SKETCH
BEAUTIFULLY.”

the cause of her losing her friend, and she was glad that he never came into the nursery now, and was less often at the house. But Muriel Erne she never saw again.

The Brownie had no playfellows, and never went to see other children, as “it would make her rude and rough, and she would lose her pretty, old-fashioned ways,” said Mamma. She was not encouraged to talk to the children she met at the

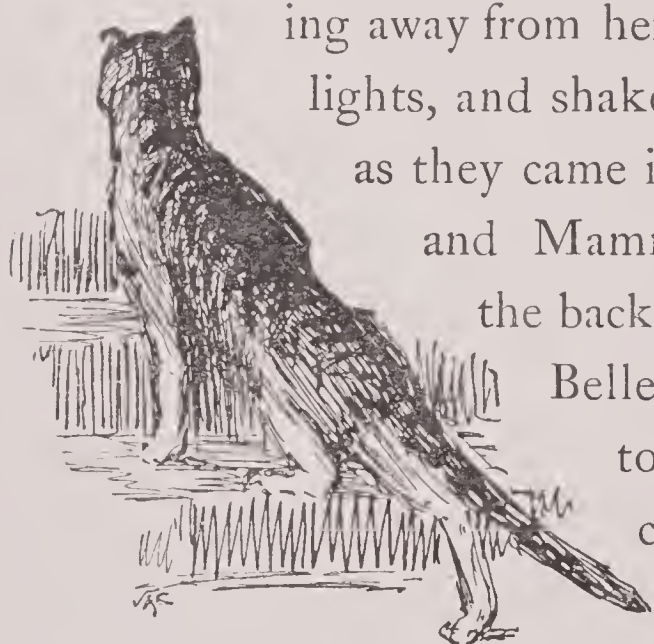
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dancing-class to which Miss Price accompanied her, either ; and partly perhaps from the forbidding aspect of that lady, partly because of her own extreme quietness and reserve, she never did grow intimate with any of them. She thought about them a great deal, and noticed things in a way she would not have done had she been more associated with them. She knew which of them were friends, and stored up scraps of their conversation which she overheard, to think about; and she had her favourite partners for the dances, but as she never said so, they thought that she was dreamy and indifferent.

The only other opportunity which the Brownie had of mixing with other children was at the parties to which she was invited, and to which she invited them — or rather to which Lady Lorraine invited them in her name, the Brownie being a passive factor in the arrangements. At these ceremonies, — they were nothing else to the Brownie, for to her mind they consisted of a daintier frock than usual, with short sleeves and a low neck, being sent in the brougham all alone to a strange house, a glare of light, the unaccustomed sound of many children

laughing and talking, a rich supper, hundreds of eyes staring at her curiously, and the drive home again very much later than her usual bedtime, when she usually fell asleep on the way, — at these ceremonies, I say, there was generally a sprinkling of elder people, who came either to see the children — “it was such a pretty sight” — or else to “help amuse the children, and start the dancing and games,” upon which occasions they generally danced with each other, or else picked out the most attractive amongst the little folks to play with. The Brownie could not only waltz perfectly, but her usual association with grown-up people rather than children drew her instinctively to this older portion of the guests. There were invariably two or three young men there, who would find out in some occult fashion that she could dance, and told each other ; and after the Brownie had waltzed with them, and talked to them in her serious grown-up fashion, she was allowed to return to the children no more. Even at supper she was usually carried off and set down amongst her elders, who amused themselves very much with her, and petted her to their hearts’ content.

Once or twice a year the Brownie returned these civilities, as Sir Charles Lorraine's daughter should, by Mamma sending out invitations for her to over a hundred children whose names she did not even know, and whom she failed to distinguish from each other. And then the great drawing-room was cleared for dancing, and there were fairy-lights in the conservatory, and a band, and a big supper, — all the paraphernalia of these other parties to which she went, in fact, except that she escaped the going alone in the brougham, or accompanied only by Nurse. But she had to stand at the door of the great empty room, with the polished floor stretch-



“THE OBJECT OF WHICH SHE WAS
FONDEST.”

ing away from her and reflecting endless lights, and shake hands with her guests as they came in, which was dreadful ; and Mamma was somewhere in the background, and Laura and Belle too, but they were not to be appealed to, because it was ridiculous for the Brownie to be a baby and too shy to receive her friends —

Heaven save the mark ! — and besides, Mamma had once openly said that she liked the picturesqueness of that tiny silk-clad figure, with its air of lonely dignity in the big room, the lights flashing over it from the curly brown head to the exquisite little slippers, and all the pomp and splendour of the great house as a background. So the Brownie choked down the lump in her throat, and greeted her guests on these terrible occasions with solemn sweetness. And no one knew that, as she stood there so quietly, she was trembling in every excitable nerve, and the hands which clung to her huge bouquet could hardly hold it still. She never thought of appealing to any one to come and help her, or at least not to stand quite so far off: that would have been babyish, and mamma would have been merrily satirical over her nervousness. She had a great desire to do as her beautiful mother wished, admiring her from the bottom of her heart with a child's devotion.

Papa never appeared on these occasions until supper-time: then he was generally to be seen eating a solitary supper near the sideboard, in a hungry fashion, and speaking only to one or two of the

grown-up people present. He was a tall, thin man, with hair which was quite grey, though still plentiful, and tired grey eyes. He embodied the Brownie's idea of age. In her own mind she always depicted Time, and Saturn, and Father Christmas as just like her father.

These were the Brownie's pleasures and duties at eight years old. She lived a life quite self-contained and separate from the rest of the household, in her nurseries, and comings and goings from the drawing-room and the street. As far as she could, she loved whatever cared for her affection. Perhaps the object of which she was fondest was a large cat, which had originally belonged to the kitchen, but preferred to trot soberly upstairs to the nursery, where, as he was well behaved and Nurse was afraid of mice, he was welcome. Master Pinnock was his name, and he was an English-bred tom—the sort of cat you always see depicted in old-fashioned story books; the breed is growing rare now. He was a long, sinewy animal, with a close, thick coat, very short and rather rough to touch, in colour a grey and white tabby—that is to say, he had a saddle of greenish-grey largely striped with black, and four

white legs, which looked as if he had on high white boots. Owing to a careless cook having spilt boiling fat on his head when he was a tiny kitten, one of his ears was burnt half away and curled up, giving him the appearance of a feline cow with a crumpled horn. He had a long white nose, very pink at the end, and a little pink mouth. His eyes were beautifully set, like a human being's rather than a cat's, with a very large black pupil inside the green iris; when he looked up at you they almost spoke, and he seemed as if he had a soul which was rather troubled to find itself in that soft furry body.

I am careful to describe Master Pinnock in detail, because he was the Brownie's only real friend and playmate. Into his whole and entire ear she confided her dreamiest fancies and aspirations — against his thick sleek side she hid her face when the loneliness of existence and the yearning for she knew not what drove her into a storm of



“ INTO HIS WHOLE AND ENTIRE
EAR SHE CONFIDED HER
DREAMIEST FANCIES.”

sobs, which she trembled lest any one should hear — and much comfort did she derive from the weight of his eleven pounds resting against her breast when she strained her muscles to carry him about in her arms.

Upon this animal the Brownie lavished her caresses and her deepest affection. Had she been asked whom she loved best in the world, she would have replied by rote, and with unconscious satire, “Mamma and Papa” ; but, as a matter of fact, their sudden removal would not have left nearly such a blank in her life as that of the grey cat with the torn ear.

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CHAPTER II



“ ‘**W**ILLIAM the Conqueror, 1066 ; William the Second, surnamed Rufus, 1087 ; William the Third, — no, Henry the First, 10 — — ’ Oh, Pin dear, I can’t remember ! ”

The Brownie was learning her lessons for the next day, sitting with one leg tucked under her, and Master Pinnock curled up asleep in her lap, which he entirely filled, thus pinning her to the big armchair where she had settled herself. Nurse was sewing at the window on the farther side of the nursery. The room was so large that she was quite out of hearing of the Brownie’s crooning repetition of the Kings and their dates, with interpolated conversation to Pinnock. “ 1100 (I wish I hadn’t had

to look). Oh, I forgot, ‘surnamed Beauclerk. Stephen the Usurper, 1135’ — are n’t you comferble, Pin?”

The grey cat stretched himself, yawned, showing a sudden pink cavity in his white fur, and twisted himself further over with his head completely hiding the lesson books, down which the Brownie was conscientiously moving a small hand, uncovering the dates as she said them. She gave a little laugh, and adapted the book to his new position, using his head to cover the dates instead of her own fingers.

“Henry the Second, — what was he surnamed? I must look — Curtmantle. Oh dear!” She heaved a little sigh, and set to her task again. “‘Henry the Second, Curtmantle, 1154 ———’” There came a knock at the door. Nurse put down her sewing and said, “Come in,” and one of the housemaids appeared on the threshold.

“Please, Nurse, m’lady says Miss Brownie is to go down to tea. And will you dress her carefully? The Duchess of Rosborough is here, and wants to see her.”

Nurse rose hurriedly. “Come along, child,” she said, in the snip-snap way that the Brownie



“THE BROWNIE WAS LEARNING HER LESSONS FOR THE
NEXT DAY.”

knew meant business. "Did my lady say what frock she was to wear?" she asked.

Yes, my lady had said the satin.

The Brownie gave vent to a heavier sigh than she had over her lessons, and began to carefully unpack herself without causing an earthquake in her lap and so upsetting Pinnock. Her movement was necessarily slow, and Nurse was impatient. She crossed the room to the rescue, and was on the point of picking up the sleeping cat by the scruff of his neck with scant ceremony. "Oh, *please*, Nurse!" exclaimed the Brownie, dropping her book, and throwing her arms round her friend.

"Well, be quick, then!" Nurse said sharply. She picked up the lesson book while the Brownie deposited Master Pinnock carefully on the chair, in the place which her little body had made warm. Then she turned to Nurse and held out her hand, looking up with her soft, serious eyes in a questioning fashion. Nurse did not stay to analyse expressions, however. She hurried her charge into the night nursery, and proceeded to array her in the prescribed frock, a garment fashioned something like a nightgown, of thick white satin, which reached

almost to the Brownie's feet, and hung in heavy folds from the embroidered yoke.

"Nurse, who is the Duchess of—something? I did n't hear," said the Brownie, as Nurse combed her curly head.

"She is a lady who is a friend of your Mamma's," was Nurse's reply. "And she's only just got to know her, and never been to the house before, so you must be very good and polite, to give her a nice impression, and let her see what a well-behaved



little girl you can be." Then her tone of moral diction changed to one of more usual brusqueness—

"Dear me, I've forgotten to change your shoes and stockings, and her

"SHE CHANGED THE BLACK STOCKINGS AND SHOES."

ladyship so particular you shall wear everything to match! Come along, and mind you don't rumple that frock!"

She lifted the Brownie and sat her on the bed, while she changed the black stockings and shoes with steel buckles for white satin slippers, embroidered to match her frock, and fine open-worked stockings, the child sitting listlessly as she was placed, with passive endurance of the whole business.

The Brownie was busy wondering whether the Duchess would be like the one in "Alice in Wonderland" who was so fond of pepper, as Nurse took her hand and led her across the landing and down the broad shallow stairs. Half way down the flight she paused.

"There, you can run on by yourself," she said. "The drawing-room door is open, I can hear by the voices. You can just push it open alone, and I'm busy."

She dropped her charge's hand and went upstairs again, without even taking the trouble to glance behind her and see if she were obeyed. But the Brownie always did as she was told. She had neither precedent nor inclination to teach her other-

wise. She went down the rest of the flight slowly and rather carefully. The drawing-room door was open, as Nurse had said, but between her and it lay the big square hall, and a long corridor with lounges and stands of flowers and alcoves, to break the monotony of its straight lines. As the Brownie stepped down the last stair, she saw a man standing before the hall-table with his back to her. She thought it must be a visitor, but waited until he should turn round to see if she recognised him, before going forward. When his face did become visible, however, she came to the conclusion, after a minute's hesitation, — for she was used to having some one to prompt her on the subject, — that it was her father, and went to speak to him.

The footman did not happen to be present, and Sir Charles appeared to be vaguely hunting for something in the bewildering drawers of a piece of furniture — half table, half sideboard, and all carved oak — before which he stood. There was a mirror beside it, and as he moved he happened to catch sight of a little white figure reflected there, and turned round abruptly.

“ Oh, ah ! — it's you, is it ? ” he said, with a faint

smile. All the wrinkles in his face seemed to start into prominence as he did so.

“How do you do?” said the Brownie, with some uncertainty. She had a vague idea that “Good morning” would have been the more correct formula for the occasion: when Mamma came into the nursery for the first time in the day, she always bade her good morning, though it might be five o’clock in the afternoon. But, as it happened, she had not seen Sir Charles for the past week, and “How do you do?” was her natural salutation, as if to a guest.

The smile lingered round Sir Charles’ lips, but he said, “I am quite well, thank you,” with due gravity. “It seems to me that you grow a good deal. How old are you?”

“I’m seven just now,” returned the Brownie. She was rather surprised at his ignorance on a subject every one else seemed to know. “But I’m going to be eight soon. I do so want to be eight. Do you think I ought n’t to?” she added earnestly, standing with one foot twisted round the other ankle in a favourite attitude of hers, and looking up at Sir Charles for his opinion.

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“Why should n’t you want to be eight?” he asked, looking rather astonished. “Children always do grow. You could n’t stay the same age.”

“Well, you see,” said Brownie, puzzled in her turn to express her ideas (which, to say truth, were rather misty to herself), “there are seven days in the week — and the world was made in the week. God did a good deal in seven days, did n’t He? — and I thought perhaps He ’d be annoyed if I wanted to be eight years old to do things in. I might be content with seven, I suppose.”

Sir Charles stood and stared at her, as she spoke, in a vacant manner. Then he said: “Well, of all the odd children! That’s a very smart frock,” he broke off. “Are you going to a party?”

“Oh no; only Mamma is at home. And the Duchess is here. Do you know the Duchess?”

“If it is the Duchess of Rosborough, I have that pleasure slightly. But I know the Duke — her husband, you know — better.”

“I don’t think the Duke has come,” said the Brownie musingly. “Mary did n’t say so. What is the Duchess like? Does she like pepper?”



“THE COAT WAS HEAVY.”

“Pepper!” repeated Sir Charles, evidently amazed.
“Why should she?”

“Well, Alice’s Duchess did — Alice in Wonderland, you know: surely you’ve read ‘Alice in Wonderland’! Why, even Laura and Belle have read that!”

The Brownie’s shocked surprise at the neglect of his education seemed to amuse Sir Charles.

“I don’t believe I have,” he said cautiously; “but if you recommend it, I will. Are you bound for the drawing-room? Then I’ll be off.”

“Yes,” said the Brownie, with a half-sigh. “I suppose you’re not coming too?” she added, with a faint hope. “Shall I help you on with your coat? James has gone away, I think.”

“I am afraid you could n’t reach, could you?” said Sir Charles.

He smiled still more broadly as the Brownie reached up her hands for the overcoat, and the wrinkles gathered about his eyes like a network. The coat was heavy; the Brownie strained her arms to hold it, but she managed to raise it sufficiently for Sir Charles to get his arms in, and then he gave it a tug and a jerk, and it slipped on to his shoulders.

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“Thank you,” he said, taking up his hat and turning again to the Brownie. “That was a great help. I don’t think I could have managed it alone.”

“No,” said the Brownie simply; “I know James always has to put you in: like Nurse does me.”

“Oh — ah !” said Sir Charles, as if he had hardly regarded it in that light. “I wonder whether James thinks of himself as my nurse? — it never struck me before. Well, good-bye, — what’s your name, by the way? I’ve forgotten.”

“Brownie,” said the Brownie. It did not surprise her that he should forget her name after not knowing her age. She had never regarded herself as very important, only as a useful adjunct.

Sir Charles disappeared behind the hall door as usual — the Brownie would have liked to ask him what he did outside, but she was afraid of being impolite — and his daughter turned away slowly and went down the corridor to the drawing-room.

There was quite a buzz of voices as the Brownie pushed the door open quietly and came in. Mamma did not perceive her at once, but Belle turned round and said, “Oh, here is my little sister, Duchess. Brownie, come and be introduced.”



“BROWNIE PUSHED THE DOOR OPEN QUIETLY AND CAME IN.”

The Brownie had stopped to speak to Lord Bay, who had caught hold of her as she passed, and asserted that she had cut him in the Park that morning.

“I saw you there with that severe lady who chaperons you so well,” he said, teasingly.

The Brownie did not understand the meaning of the word exactly, but she fancied that he wanted to make fun of her, and acknowledged the effort with a little smile.

“I didn’t see you,” she said, looking gravely into the young man’s laughing eyes. Lord Bay’s face was always represented in her memory by a smile and a brown moustache; she could not recollect more of it when he was not present, but she thought he had a hooked nose.

Several people had ceased their conversation, and turned round to listen in evident expectation of being entertained. The Brownie’s heart began to beat faster. It always frightened her to hear the sudden cessation of sound which generally preceded her speeches, and the half-familiar faces round her danced before her eyes, a blur of amusement.

“I was going to take off my hat to you, but you would n’t look,” Lord Bay said.

“Perhaps if you took it off next time without waiting for me to bow, I should catch sight of you doing it!” suggested the Brownie. Her soft little voice sounded dreadfully clear to her own ears, and she heard the laugh which followed in hopeless wonder.

“She says he is to take off his hat another time without waiting for her to bow!” The whisper went round the group like an echo. Why did they repeat her words and laugh? She had said it in all good faith, with an honest effort to avoid being rude. There was nothing so terrible as little girls who were rude—or shy. It was ill-bred. To be ill-bred was the depth of degradation. The Brownie’s daily lessons came back upon her mind in bewildering confusion. She turned her serious brown eyes away from Lord Bay in search of a refuge, and saw Belle watching her with the same expression of amusement as was on all the other faces. But Belle had called her to be introduced to the Duchess; at least that important person was a woman, and not a young man. In the Brownie’s innermost conception of Heaven there were *no* young men.

She left Lord Bay and slipped her hand into Belle's, who laughed and said, "Has Lionel finished his accusations, Brownie?" — Lionel being Lord Bay's Christian name; but, to the Brownie's relief, she went on, without waiting for an answer, "This is the Brownie, Duchess," and led the Brownie up to a lady who was sitting in the middle of the room.

The Duchess was a stout woman, who wore handsome mantles and moved in an atmosphere of good-nature and prosperity. The Brownie looked straight up in her customary manner, and saw a broad plain face, without a single feature to stamp it as more aristocratic than Mrs. Turpin's, the housekeeper, but with something in it that made her put her hand out willingly and come a step nearer of her own accord. There was kindness beaming in the Duchess's eyes, and her large mouth had a generous curve.

"How do you do?" she said, in a pleasant voice that the Brownie liked. "So you are Lady Lorraine's little girl? Do you know, I fancied from her description of you that you were quite big! I expected you to be a much larger Brownie than you are."

“I don’t think I’m very big,” said the Brownie.
“But then I’m not eight yet.”

“No ; well, that is n’t very much, is it? And I expect your sisters are too big to play with you, are n’t they? Don’t you wish you had some little folks sometimes?”

“I don’t generally think about it,” said the Brownie candidly. “You see, every one is always grown up, and I don’t know any children very well.”

She was leaning against the Duchess’s knee by this time, with one hand absently stroking the fur on her cloak. She wondered why that lady suddenly put an arm round her, and, looking up, wondered more at the expression in her eyes. But it was very restful : the Duchess did not laugh at her, or say things she could not understand, and the Brownie’s nerves grew quiet again from the strain Lord Bay had put upon them.

“You must come and see me, will you?” said the Duchess. “I have n’t any little girl of my own to play with you, but I have a lot of nephews and nieces.”

“I should like to come,” said the Brownie with sincerity ; “and to see *you*,” she added, with a grace



“SHE WONDERED WHY THAT LADY SUDDENLY PUT AN ARM
ROUND HER.”

which was charming because she evidently meant it. "You have n't brought the Duke with you, have you?" she asked after a moment, with interest.

"No, not to-day," said the Duchess. "He is very busy, and can't go and visit people much."

"I want to see him," said the Brownie confidentially, "because I think it would interest Papa. He knows the Duke."

"You shall see him when you come to Rosborough House. He is very fond of little girls." The Duchess sighed, and stooped to kiss the Brownie. "He would like to have one of his own," she said. — "Good-bye, Lady Lorraine; I really must be going. I have stayed an unconscionable time for a first call, but I have been making friends with the Brownie. May she come and see me? I should so like to have her."

"Thank you very much, Duchess," said the Brownie's mother. "I am sure she would like it immensely."

"Will you send her some afternoon, then? Not my calling day, because I should see nothing of her. Would next Thursday do? As soon after lunch as you like."

“Thank you ; yes, it would do perfectly. But are you sure you want her all the afternoon ? Please don’t be bored with her,” said Mamma, laughing.

“She will not bore me at all. I love children,” said the Duchess.

“And she is not noisy or tiresome,” said Mamma. “You will find her quite a grown-up and companionable little mortal.”

The Duchess looked at the Brownie with another of those strange smiles — almost as if she were sorry. “Then that is settled,” she said. “Good-bye again, Lady Lorraine.”

“Good-bye,” said Mamma. “Laura, dear !”

Laura rang the bell, and James appeared to bow the Duchess out. The Brownie caught sight of his powdered hair and long legs down the length of the corridor as the Duchess left the drawing-room. She was just at the door when another visitor was announced, who stood aside to let her pass. It was rather late for any one to be arriving now, and the Brownie looked with unconscious interest to see who it was. She had caught the name — Major Maude — and it was one she did not know.

Her mother was standing behind her, with one

hand on her shoulder, as she had been when the Duchess left. Somehow the Brownie had known by the way she did it that she was pleased, and liked the invitation for her to Rosborough House. She waited now for her mother to move forward to meet this last arrival ; but the hand was not removed from her shoulder, — instead the pressure became suddenly heavier, until it was a spasmodic clasp as Major Maude came up the room. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a dark face, which even at a first glance was undeniably handsome. He came threading his way slowly through the visitors and furniture, but half-way up the room he hesitated. Neither Belle nor Laura seemed to know him, — no one attempted to help his uncertainty, — all the Brownie's instincts of courtesy were aroused. She turned in astonishment to her mother, and looked up at her with wondering eyes. There was a bright pink flush on Mamma's face, and her eyes were flashing ; the Brownie thought how beautiful



“JAMES APPEARED
TO BOW THE
DUCHESS OUT.”

she was. She was looking straight at Major Maude, but still she did not stir, and he advanced again until he reached her.

“How do you do?” she said then, in her usual musical voice. Mamma had such a sweet way of speaking, and such a pretty laugh. “What a long time it seems since we met!”

“It is nine years,” said Major Maude. “I feel a good deal older. But you — you have not altered, Lallage.”

Nine years! The Brownie was eight years old, nearly, so that was before she was born. She regarded Major Maude with interest. He was no older, not so old, indeed, as many of the men whom she saw constantly. When he knew Mamma they must have been quite young. The Brownie stood beside her mother and looked at him. He had thick black hair cut close to his head, and a big black moustache. His brows were very black, too, and his eyes too dark to distinguish their colour; his jaw was square, his forehead low and broad, his features massive, and his skin very bronzed from the edge of his collar to the middle of his forehead, where there was a line as if he had worn a cap, and the skin

above it was comparatively pale. The Brownie admired him silently, with intervals of admiring Mamma, too, whose lovely flush kept on coming and going, and her eyes sparkling with a new brilliance. And these two, who had not met for nine years, talked on over her head.

“I thought you were in India,” said Mamma.

“I am invalided home — my time was nearly up.”

“You have got your majority, I notice.”

“You are quick to notice changes — Lady Lorraine.”

“I cannot return the compliment, Major Maude. You said I had not altered.”

“You have not — outwardly.”

“Nonsense. I am nine years older; I have been married all that time, too. I have quite a large daughter. You must see her; then you will realise the difference. Brownie!”

The Brownie stepped forward and stood between them. There was a little mocking smile on Mamma’s lips as Major Maude looked down quickly.

“Brownie, I am going to give Major Maude

some tea," she said. "Stay and talk to him while I get it."

She moved away, the sweep of her gown over the polished floor giving her progress an imperial air of its own. Major Maude sat down and drew the Brownie towards him. He was very strong — she could feel that through the gentleness of the touch — and the breadth of his chest struck the Brownie afresh as she stood between his knees where he had placed her. He was looking at her critically when Mamma came back with a cup of tea.

"I have done you the honour of bringing it to you myself," she said, placing it beside him, "because you are an old friend. Well, what do you think of her? She is not much like me, is she?"

"She is too fair, but she has your eyes," he said briefly. A little pleased flush stole into Brownie's face: she had never thought that her eyes were like Mamma's.

"Is n't she a quaint little figure?" said Mamma lightly. "I do so enjoy choosing her frocks. It is like dressing a big doll."

"It would be. But — you to have a child!"

"Why? Am I so very unfitted, Rorie?"

Mamma's voice was very low and soft then.

"You are — yourself, Lallage."

Major Maude had released the Brownie and stood up. They looked at each other again over her head.

"I must introduce you to my step-daughters," Mamma said suddenly, and rather hastily.

"Do you get on with them?" he asked, with something — was it mockery? — in his voice.

"Perfectly. At first, you see, they were girls at school; but they always came home for the holidays, and they did me the kindness to adore me."

"So you forgave them their existence."

"And when they grew up I made them companions. It is so vulgar to be jealous of one's step-daughters. Besides, we never interfered with each other, and they were a success from the first. Belle is engaged to Lord Bay, and Laura is on the verge of being engaged to another eligible. Don't lose your heart to either of them, please."

"Supposing I have no heart to lose?"

"Are you married, Rorie?"

"No."

"Engaged?"

“Lallage, don't try me too far.”

There came a pause. The Brownie felt as she did before a thunder-storm, and trembled without knowing why. Then Mamma spoke very quietly.

“Rorie, if we are to be friends you must remember that I am Lady Lorraine.”

“If you think there is danger of my forgetting it, you have but to give my name to your butler as one of those to whom you are not at home.”

Mamma tapped her feet against the fender. The Brownie unconsciously watched the beading on her slipper catch the firelight.

“Why cannot we be friends?” she said at last. “There is no reason why we should not be. We are older and wiser by nine years. Let us enjoy the present. Allusions to the past would be impossible between us.”

“Then perhaps I had better not come here.”

“Perhaps — I want you to come here.”

It was as Greek to the Brownie; but her instinct recognised a dangerous atmosphere. She waited for Major Maude's reply with strained senses.

“Ah, Lallage, have it your own way. I am to

meet you on a new footing — is that it? So be it: you have always decreed the impossible. But I warn you — ”

“ And now come and be introduced to Belle,” said Mamma, and there was a laugh in her voice. “ Belle, this is one of my oldest friends, — Major Maude, Miss Lorraine. — Is the Brownie’s tea waiting, Nurse? ” for Nurse had made her appearance, as she usually did near seven o’clock, with a deprecatory air. “ Very well; but I’m afraid she won’t eat any more. The men will give her so many sweet biscuits. Say good-bye to Major Maude, Brownie.” The Brownie glanced at her, caught a hint by instinct (for Mamma did not even smile), and lifted her face to be kissed. It was an unusual honour, though Major Maude did not know it.

CHAPTER III



ROSBOROUGH

House was large and square, with an air of Early-Victorian furniture and solid comfort about it.

When the Brownie first made its acquaintance

she recognised its lack of taste under the stigma that it was not nearly as pretty as her own home, — “Mam-

ma’s house” she called it, with unconscious significance. Perhaps having no children had kept the Duke and Duchess old-fashioned in taste, but as a fact they preferred the familiar ugliness around them to having their house done up in the modern style with ancient furniture. They were extravagantly kind to the Brownie, whom they petted and spoiled to their hearts’

content, but it was a kind of spoiling to which the child had never been accustomed, and which she appreciated accordingly.

The Duke was a big, florid man, with a rich, full voice which rang like a deep-toned bell; he was rather fat, and he wore rough tweed of a startling plaid pattern whenever respectability did not force him into a black coat. His collars always looked whiter than any one else's in contrast to his red neck, and his large ties were generally very light and clean.

The Brownie clung a little tighter to the Duchess's hand on the first occasion when she was led into the ducal presence, and took her courage in both hands to go forward and speak to him. Oh that "going forward"! How she dreaded it, and how paralysed her limbs felt, until her feet seemed weighted with lead!

"This is the little girl I told you about, Tom," said the Duchess, in her pleasant voice. She clasped the little hand sympathetically, and walked with the Brownie up to the deep arm-chair in which the Duke's portly figure was reposing.

"Eh? What? Why, bless my soul! So this is Sir Charles Lorraine's little daughter, is it?"

He threw down the paper, and his blue eyes lighted up with a very friendly smile. (After all, a Duke is a human being, thought the Brownie, — and not a king, so he can't order people's heads to be chopped off.) “What a very grave little lady! Supposing you come and sit on my knee, my dear. I'm an old gentleman, and may be allowed that privilege.”

It was the Duchess who lifted the Brownie on to her husband's knee, but the child sat there very contentedly.

“There! I thought you could n't be going to be afraid of me!” he said.

“I don't think I am ever afraid of people,” said the Brownie thoughtfully. “I can't be, you see, because I always have to talk to them. But I never saw a Duke before.”

“Oh!” said the Duke, with a twinkle in his eyes, “and now you do see one, he is very like other people, eh?”

“Well, I suppose you *are* the same as other people, are n't you?” said the Brownie, puzzled. “I did n't think you would be different yourself exactly, only I could n't remember if I had to go out of your presence backwards.”

The Duke burst into a hearty laugh, and after a second the Brownie joined in. When the Duchess returned (she had gone away to consult the house-keeper about a certain jam for tea), she found them conversing happily, the Brownie having examined her new friend's watch, and asked the meaning of the seal hanging to the chain. She was busy trying to get the motto under the crest into her head — “Flecti, non frangi,” — and gravely demanded the translation.

“Well, it's the motto of the family,” said his Grace. “It means ‘Bent, not broken.’”

The Brownie knit her brows. “How could you be broken?” she asked. “Does it mean your legs and arms?”

“It's a kind of parable, Brownie,” said the Duchess, coming to the rescue. “It means something hidden which it only hints.”

“Like the Sower?” said the Brownie with interest. The Sower was her favourite among the Parables in the Bible, chiefly on account of the hymn “A sower went forth sowing,” which she loved with all the intensity of a poet's nature.

“Yes — one thing shown by another,” said the

Duchess. “‘Bent, not broken,’ means that we” (she always identified herself with her husband) “may be persuaded, but not forced to do a thing. And it also means that, though fortune may go against us, we never give up hope, we have courage to the end.” She laid her hand on her husband’s shoulder, and a glance passed between them which beautified the two plain elderly faces with a sympathy to which the Brownie was a stranger. The child, moral orphan that she was, looked from one to the other as she sat on the Duke’s knee, and wondered at that unfamiliar flash between husband and wife which spoke of perfect understanding and confidence.

“‘Bent — not broken,’ ” she repeated slowly, and then “‘Courage — and hope.’ I wish it were *my* motto! Have we a motto? Papa and Mamma as well, I mean.”

“Why, of course,” said the Duke cheerfully. “Get Debrett, Mary, and see what the Brownie’s motto is. I have forgotten.”

Debrett proved interesting, for the Brownie found all the names of her innermost circle there set forth in full — “Charles Edward Lorraine,” that was

Papa, and later the Brownie's own name, or rather list of names, which awed her considerably.

"I don't like the crest as well as yours," she said, regarding the clenched hand on her father's shield with disfavour. "Your crooked tree is much nicer." For so she described the heraldic device of the Dukes of Rosborough, which represents a sturdy branch curved gracefully towards the left — "bent, not broken."

"Why have we got a fist, and what is the motto?"

The motto was in English, "I have and hold." It displeased the last daughter of the Lorraines.

"I think it's horrid," she said, pushing away the book with indignation. "It sounds as if you had grabbed something."

"And meant to stick to it," added the Duke, laughing.

"It's like Pinnock with a mouse," said the Brownie.

"Who is Pinnock?" asked the Duke.

Thereat followed an explanation, and a detailed account of the grey cat's virtues, which lasted until tea; soon after which the carriage arrived for

Miss Lorraine, and she departed, after hugging her new friends, feeling quite sorry to go, for no one had ever been so interested in the things that made her small world, and she had chatted happily to her host and hostess without nervousness or constraint. Usually the Brownie had to talk to people about what interested them, not her, and they chose difficult subjects in order to get her small ideas thereon and then laugh. But the Duke had really listened to her accounts of Pinnock's hunting feats with interest, and the Duchess had encouraged her to give her impressions of the children at the dancing class, and in return had told her of the tricks her nieces and nephews played when they stopped with her, both at Rosborough House and Coombe Weald, the great estate in the country. "They were a merry, noisy crew," said the Duchess, laughing; "the boys were dreadful pickles, and the girls were nearly as bad." But she seemed to like them none the less because they romped and made a noise; and the Duke's highest recommendation was for a little grand-nephew named Ethelred,—"Silly name for a boy," said the Duke sturdily; "tempting the others to call him Ethel, only he



“ “I HAD GONE TO ROSBOROUGH HOUSE TO SEE THE DUCHESS.” ”

was too manly to stand it," — because this ten-year-old hero was just the pluckiest little chap of the lot, never knew when he was beaten, and had sharp wits to boot. "And yet," added his Grace, "he's a regular boy, and loves games like a puppy. He has no modern mawkishness about him. I'm dead against boys putting on airs and pretending to be men!"

The Brownie thought it must be a good and fortunate thing to be related to a duke and stay at Coombe Weald. She jumped into the carriage glad and merry, and looked forward joyfully to her next visit at Rosborough House. Only when she stood once more in the hall at her own home, the elation died out of her little figure, and the sparkle out of her dreamy brown eyes. She was once more the quiet, self-possessed little lady who was dressed and undressed "like a big doll"; and when Mamma chancing to sweep downstairs on her way to the drawing-room, paused to smile and ask her how she had enjoyed herself, she answered with her usual seriousness: "Very much. I saw the Duke, and they asked me to go again next Tuesday, if I may."

Mamma nodded, smiled, and passed on. She

looked pleased. The Brownie, turning to follow Nurse upstairs, suddenly encountered the unexpected appearance of Sir Charles in evening dress, also on his way to dinner.

“Oh!” he said, stopping short, and looking at the Brownie with the same untranslatable expression as before; “so there you are. Where were you this afternoon?”

The Brownie stopped too on the lowest stair, leaving Nurse to proceed by herself.

“I had gone to Rosborough House to see the Duchess,—and the Duke,” she added, as a point of further interest for him.

Sir Charles rubbed his chin meditatively.

“There was no one to help me on with my coat,” he remarked, with a faint smile somewhere back in his weary eyes.

“Oh, I *am* sorry!” said the Brownie. “Where was James?”

“I sent James away. I thought perhaps the fairies would come to my rescue again.”

The Brownie did not quite understand what he meant, but her instinct saw enough to help her out.

“I would have been there if I had known,” she

said. "I think I could have done it. What time did you go out?"

"About five o'clock."

"I'll be there to-morrow, if that will do,—at least, I think I can. I generally go down to the drawing-room, you know."

It was plain to her mind that Sir Charles preferred her to help him to the footman,—why, she neither knew nor asked herself. The giving pleasure to some one else was a necessity to the Brownie, if it were in her power. It was enough for her to be sure that it would give Sir Charles pleasure to see her at five o'clock to-morrow to make her wish to contrive it.

"Miss Brownie!" called Nurse from somewhere up the house; and then, catching sight of a grey head disappearing down the passage, she changed it to a more suitable appellation, "Miss 'Ero!"—to which the Brownie replied, "Yes, Nurse; I'm coming," and followed thoughtfully, turning over ways and means in her mind.

Nurse was surprised and a little relieved the next afternoon, when, on her way to the drawing-room with the Brownie in charge, the child stopped her at the head of the stairs.

“I can go alone, Nurse,” she said, gently but firmly. “You need n’t trouble to come any further, really.”

Nurse’s tea was growing cold upon the tray upstairs. It had appeared simultaneously with the order for the Brownie’s appearance in the drawing-room. She let go the small hand with inward satisfaction and outward reluctance.

“Well, to be sure, you’re not a baby now. But be sure and go straight there, Miss Brownie; and whatever you do, don’t muss your frock.”

It was green velvet to-day, and the Brownie looked more like an elf than ever. She nodded gravely, put her small hand on the wide top of the banisters, and went slowly downstairs. Nurse gave one glance to see that she was progressing quietly, and, without waiting to see her any farther, hurried back to her tea.

The Brownie went down to the foot of the stairs, and then she hesitated. It was just five o’clock — she had ascertained that before she left the nursery; but Sir Charles was not there, and she could not wait. Increasing anxiety was beginning to wrinkle up her smooth forehead, when she heard a door shut in her rear, and a man’s voice speaking.

“ You need n’t wait, James,” it said.

The Brownie’s face cleared. She waited until Sir Charles reached the centre of the hall, and then ran across to him.

“ I can help you to-day,” she said.

He put his heavy coat into her tiny hands ; but when the Brownie had assisted him as before, and he had shaken himself into it, he seemed in no particular hurry.

“ So you went to Rosborough House,” he said. “ How did you like the Duke ? ”

“ *Very* much,” said the Brownie, emphatically. “ What a pity he has no children ! ”

Sir Charles stared at the small figure before him in a larger surprise than ever.

“ Of course it is a misfortune for a man,” he said. “ Still, there ’s his nephew to inherit, you know, besides a younger brother.” Then, something in the Brownie’s face seeming to strike him, he said, “ Was that why you were sorry ? ”

“ No, I don’t think so,” she replied. “ I only meant that if he had a — a little girl, he would be so fond of her, you know, and she would be *so* happy.”

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A deep sigh came from the Brownie's very heart at the memory of the Duchess's voice and touch, and she thought of the Duke's kindly, simple interest as he listened to her.

Sir Charles had turned away from her, and was hunting for something in the pocket of his coat. It took a long time to find, and when he turned round again there seemed to be more wrinkles than usual in his face.

"It must be very nice to be a Duke," said the Brownie, to continue the conversation.

"Yes," said Sir Charles absently.

"Could you be a Duke?" she asked, twining one foot round the other in her favourite attitude.

"N—no," said Sir Charles; "but I could be a peer." A dull flush rose to his face, and his eyes grew keen. "Did your mother tell you to ask me?" he said, so abruptly and sharply that the child started.

"Mamma!" she repeated, in a dazed fashion. "Oh no! she does n't know that I ever speak to you. She never says anything about you at all."

The flush died away from her father's face, and left him curiously white. He began to seek for an

elusive handkerchief again, muttering broken sentences which perplexed the Brownie. "She might then — I suppose I should be more worth while — Birthday Honours, or after the Session —" After a minute he seemed to remember her, and turned round again.

"I've got 'Alice in Wonderland,'" he said. The Brownie was just about to ask how he liked it, when the door-bell rang. Sir Charles hastily picked up his hat and disappeared studywards, and his daughter ran down the corridor to the drawing-room.

There were the usual crowd of callers ; but the Brownie eluded her would-be captors and made her way to Major Maude, whom she perceived as she entered. He was taller than most of the men present, and his dark head towered into view over the girl to whom he was talking. He did not see the Brownie until she offered him her hand, his companion's attention having been claimed by some one else.

"Well, my little friend," he said, lifting her into his arms, "where were you all yesterday afternoon?" and he sat down with her on his knee.

Every one seemed desirous of knowing that; but the Brownie, sure of her own unimportance, entered it to the account of the Duke's celebrity. She began telling Major Maude about her visit: not the real valuable part of it to her, the atmosphere of home and love which had shone upon her like the sun on a plant hitherto kept in the dark; but the little sketchy parts, the house, and the fact that the Duke could not leave town when he wished because of Parliament, all of which she detailed gravely, guided by the amused smile in his eyes. Mamma joined them after a few minutes.

"Still devoted to the Brownie?" she asked, with that pretty colour in her face which the Brownie was beginning to associate with Major Maude. "Has she invited you to her dance?"

"No, not yet. Are you going to ask me, Brownie?"

"I should like to, very much. When is it to be, Mamma?" said the Brownie gently, but her heart gave a great throb of fear. A dance! That meant one of those evenings of torture when she played hostess.

"Next month, when your birthday comes. The

invitations went out yesterday. We must give your guests due notice, for they are sure to have engagements," said Mamma, laughing. "It is to be fancy dress."

"Will you come in uniform?" asked the Brownie, turning to Major Maude. "Please do: I should so like to see you."

Mamma's eyes and the Major's met. The Brownie saw the glance pass over her head as she sat on his knee.

"Will you come in uniform?" Mamma repeated in a lower voice. "How many years is it since I saw you in uniform, Rorie?"

The Brownie heard the big breath that he drew in between his teeth, and felt his chest fall and rise. She had an indefinable feeling that danger followed when Mamma dropped her voice.

"Do you remember the Review?" Mamma went on.

"Remember! . . . Lallage, you should have been a Chinese rather than an English woman."

"Why?"

"They are the finest torturers in the world."

The Brownie heard her mother try to laugh — a

laugh that ended in a strange, rising sigh. She turned away for a moment. When she spoke again it was quite in her usual tone.

“I think a children’s fancy dress ball the prettiest sight in the world,” she said. “The Brownie always has a sprinkling of older people at her parties. They *will* come. We mean even the grown-ups to wear fancy dress on this occasion, but of course dominos are allowed. The Brownie is going to appear *as* the Brownie. Such a pretty dress! I have been designing it—brown velvet cut into the shape of leaves at the edge of the skirt, and a tiny mouseskin cap, and such delightful downy wings! She is going to carry a hazel wand with an electric-light star, to look like a will-o’-the-wisp.”

The Brownie heard the stream of talk flow on with vague comprehension. She took little or no interest, for she could think of nothing but the heavy throbbing of Major’s Maude’s heart as she leaned back against his breast. She was sure he was in pain, and she did not know how to help him. She dared not ask either, and felt as helpless as the day that Pinnock hurt his paw and came limping in and looking at her with agonised eyes which all

but spoke. As long as Mamma sat there talking Major Maude listened in a terrible, weary silence, and the Brownie quivered in sympathy. He remained after many of the visitors had gone, and she hovered about him, feeling that there was something he wanted and could not express. When he went, Mamma bade him good-bye in the same light, indifferent tone, and the Brownie saw his eyes burn and blaze as he turned away. The remembrance of his trouble blotted out even her own, and not until she had got back to her own quarters did she have time to brood over the ordeal which awaited her next month.



CHAPTER IV

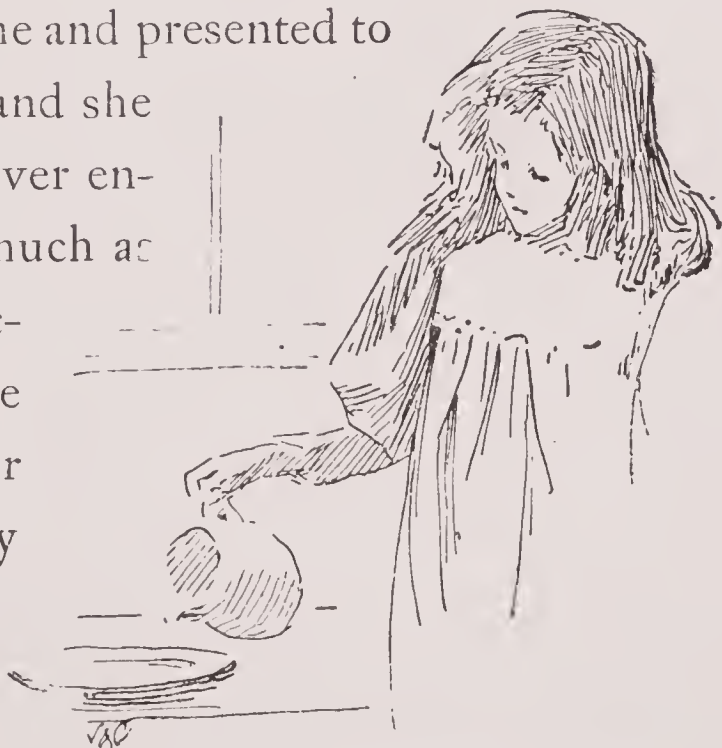
THE following weeks were an endless succession of “tryings on” and “dress rehearsals” to the Brownie. First, the mouseskin cap, executed after Lady Lorraine’s design, was too clumsy; then the wings were far too large — “they would get in the way when she waltzed, and the men would vote them a nuisance” — not the boys, mark you; the Brownie generally danced with some one twice her height for two-thirds of the evening. This remedied, the brown velvet garment in which she was to appear was a thought too long. The Brownie stood through endless fittings and consultations — a patient, uninterested little model, whose drooping mouth and hopeless eyes passed unnoticed as she went through in fancy the great occasion when she was to figure in all this carefully schemed costume.

There were intervals of sunshine, too, in these weeks — visits to Rosborough House, during which



“ BROWNIE STOOD THROUGH ENDLESS FITTINGS AND CONSULTATIONS.”

the Brownie learned to laugh, and played in a subdued imitation of those fortunate nieces and nephews about whom she was never tired of hearing. The Duke's knee was her throne, and was always ready for her, and into the Duchess's ear she poured many a small hope and trouble hitherto confided only to Master Pinnock. Not that she neglected the grey cat because she had found human sympathy: the Brownie never forgot old friends. Owing to a delightful suggestion of the Duchess's, they went on a shopping expedition together, and bought a large blue-and-white saucer, which the Brownie triumphantly carried home and presented to her feline friend; and she was sure he had never enjoyed his milk so much as on the great occasion when she poured it out for him into his very own saucer.



There was another interest newly sprung up in the

“SHE POURED IT OUT FOR HIM INTO HIS
VERY OWN SAUCER.”

Brownie's life. Ever since she had gently explained her reason for wishing to be at home at a certain hour, the Duke and Duchess had seen that she should be when she was visiting them. They timed it to a nicety that the Brownie should alight at her own door and be in the hall just when Sir Charles was likely to be going out; and the Brownie felt very grateful to them for understanding that she liked to do what her most casual acquaintance asked her — even Papa. He was not nearly such a distant relation as he had been, of course, because she saw him nearly every day now, and they contrived to talk, unless any one came into the hall, or Mamma's step were heard approaching, when, quite inexplicably, Sir Charles would be looking for his ever-missing gloves and the Brownie going slowly upstairs to the nursery. It puzzled her why this should be so; but as she could not explain it, and it was one of the unwritten laws of her life that she should not ask questions, she simply acquiesced as usual, and followed her father's lead without attempting to understand further. They generally managed to talk a little, however. Sir Charles had read "Alice in Wonder-

land,” and at the Brownie’s further recommendation “On a Pincushion” and “The Little People,” and they discussed these books together. Though a mere novice in fairy-tale reading, Sir Charles proved intelligent. He appreciated “The Toy Princess” as much as the Brownie herself, and regarded her with a deeper scrutiny when she explained that it reminded her of herself. “I always somehow have to say just what people wish and nothing more,” she said. “Only I’m a real toy, you know, and I’m not living somewhere else all the while.”



“SIR CHARLES STOOPED DOWN AND KISSED HER.”

Sir Charles did not look as if he had known, but he was ready to be instructed. “Your mother —” he began.

“Yes, Mamma is n’t a queen, I know. But she looks like one, don’t you think?”

“Perhaps she would like to be one?” he suggested.

“Yes,” said the Brownie thoughtfully. “I don’t

know. I think she'd like to be a — what was it that you said you could be?"

"A peer — like Lord Bay, you know."

"Yes, that's it. What will Belle be when she marries him?"

"A peeress."

"Is that more than Mamma?"

"Yes: I am only a baronet."

"What a pity! — for Mamma, I mean," said the Brownie. "Of course it could n't make *you* any different."

Sir Charles stooped down and kissed her.

The terrible day of the fancy ball dawned at last. The Brownie would hardly have recognised it until the evening, but that, as she went out for her walk with Miss Price, a cartload of palms and hothouse plants were being carried in through the hall and arranged in banks of moss up the stairs. There was red carpet, too, being unrolled, and a group of onlookers of the poorer class were staring up at the bunting, which was being extended farther along the balcony.

"Lor', look at the young laidy!" said a nursemaid to a badly-dressed child she was leading.



““DON'T YOU WISH YOU WAS GOING, BELLA?””

“It’s ’er party, I should n’t wonder. Don’t you wish you was going, Bella?”

Bella sniffed by way of reproach to Fortune for not having dowered her equally with the “little lady” whose sad brown eyes looked back at the children of the poor with an expression whose meaning they could not divine. They envied her! The Brownie knit her brows in the effort not to be as basely ungrateful as she felt. But — they could not understand.

“I have at last, my dear Hero, procured a specimen of the Spanish oak leaf for your collection,” said Miss Price; and the Brownie came back to botany almost with relief.

It was a very hot day in the beginning of May. All the afternoon the sunlight burnt the dusty pavements outside, and the sun-blinds were drawn over the windows of the night-nursery, where the Brownie was told to lie down and rest in preparation for the late hours she was about to keep. It was impossible to go to sleep like Master Pinnock, who jumped on to the bed beside her and stretched his body out limply, dozing off in a highly enviable manner. The Brownie lay still, with wide eyes gazing about the

darkened room, where the shaded sun made a yellow gloom. It was dull work, without even a book ; but then she was supposed to be asleep. At five o'clock she had her tea, and about half-past seven a kind of light supper. The guests were not asked until half-past eight. " And they won't come until nine," Mamma had said, " which will give us time to eat our dinners in comfort ! "

Then came the solemn process of dressing. It began with a bath, and ended with the electric-light wand, of which Nurse had an almost superstitious dread. Her openly expressed hope that the tiny battery might not explode and do anybody a mischief was not likely to inspire confidence, and the Brownie went downstairs to be inspected, trembling with an added fright.

Mamma was dressed in a lovely velvet gown and a high pearled collar : she looked an ideal Mary Queen of Scots, and the Brownie thought it was little wonder that Darnley and Bothwell should have been jealous of everybody else if she were really at all like that. Laura was all in white, as Dresden China ; and Belle was Portia, the red cap and gown suiting her admirably. The Brownie caught a



“IT WAS DULL WORK, WITHOUT EVEN A BOOK.”

glimpse of a grey head she knew disappearing down a passage, and the glitter of a sword, and recognised that even Sir Charles was in Court dress, as Harrington Oval, the great R.A., had painted his portrait.

Mamma and Belle and Laura expressed great satisfaction over her dress; and Archibald, whom she had not known to be in the house, appeared in uniform, and asked her how many hearts she meant to break to-night—to which the Brownie answered very seriously that she

hoped none; and even Vivian, the younger and taller and thinner of her step-brothers, laughed faintly. His endless body was enveloped in a black college gown, because he was a B.A.—though what that meant the Brownie did not know.



PORTIA.

Lord Bay had been dining with the family also, and he brought the Brownie a beautiful shower bouquet of moss-roses, pink and white, and with



DRESSEN CHINA.

long trails of green. She liked the flowers, but objected to the kiss he exacted in payment, and was almost glad when the arrival of her first guests relieved her of his teasing.

Manima had motioned her to her usual place near the door, and had said, "You know what to do, Brownie," before she went back to laugh and talk with Archie and Vivian; and the Brownie, shifting her dangerous wand to her left hand, held out her right

graciously to the bewildering stream of children who were being announced. If it had been difficult to know her guests of former years, it was well-nigh impossible this, when their strange

dresses or powdered hair changed them beyond knowledge. The Brownie's head ached with Knights Templars and Dutch Dolls, Fairy Queens and Pierrots, Duchesses of Devonshire and Clowns; and she found the grown-up people little better. It was hard to realise, for instance, that the fierce bushranger, with bowies and pistols in his belt, was merely Mr. Gordon-Staines, whom she had seen only yesterday drinking tea in a perfectly mild and harmless fashion; or that Captain Lisle had suddenly become transformed into a Viking, with winged helmet and a bearskin flung over his shoulder in place of the shiny top-hat and frock coat of every-day life. Such a lot of people brought her flowers too! The men were always handing her huge bouquets, and saying would she accept them, and might they have a dance? At last Archibald laid them carefully on the ground at her feet — five or six great nosegays — in the midst of which she stood, shut in by the scented ring and shaking hands across it.



PIERROT.

The Brownie tried hard to commit the children's faces to memory: she thought she should remember one pretty little girl dressed as Red Riding Hood, and a smaller child who was a baby doll, and



A VIKING.

one tall handsome boy in the costume of a Toreador, whose face passed her vaguely as she shook hands with Major Maude. The Major had only just arrived, and the Brownie looked at his broad shoulders in their red-and-gold bravery, and the big spurs which jingled as he walked, and smiled at him.

“You must give me some dances,” he said, and added his initials to her fast filling programme. “I have brought you some flowers, but I see you have so many already that you won’t care for them.”

“Please give them to me: I should like them very much,” was the Brownie’s answer. “And I

will carry them instead of the others," she added, with a hope of pleasing her mother.

His dark face lightened, and he put the clusters of white roses into her hands. Then he passed on behind her, and the Brownie knew whom he had gone to meet; but she could not see her mother even reflected in the big mirrors, for the crowd was thickening.

The Duke and Duchess had promised to put in an appearance, but the Brownie did not see them



“IN THE MIDST OF WHICH SHE STOOD.”

come, for they were late, and when the third waltz began Lord Bay would wait no longer, and claimed the dance which the Brownie had promised him. The bouquets were carefully piled up on the mantelpiece in an imposing array, and somebody took care



RED RIDING HOOD.

of the electric-light wand — to its rightful owner's great relief — and then the Brownie put her small hand on the gold lace of Lord Bay's mess-jacket and was whirled off down the great room, the polished floor flying under her light feet, and the clash of the band urging her on in a maddening measure. Her future brother — Lord Bay was always

ready to insist on the relationship — danced well, and the Brownie enjoyed the waltz. They went into the conservatory when it was over and the Brownie had taken her flowers again, and sat amongst the great palms and the fairy lights. Other couples were visible at a distance; the Brownie



“THE POLISHED FLOOR FLYING UNDER HER LIGHT FEET.”

could see Laura and Mr. Gifford, and thought she caught a glimpse of Mamma's velvet train at the farthest end, but her partner, whoever it was, was hidden.

"Whose flowers are you carrying?" asked Lord Bay, with intent to tease. "It's awfully hard on us other fellows; you've clung to those white roses in preference to any others."

"Major Maude brought them," said the Brownie simply, adding gently, "I could n't carry them *all*, you see."

"You might give us each a turn," he suggested.

"Would n't that be rather — rather a poor compliment?" asked the Brownie sedately. "You see, it's such a very little time for each."

Lord Bay threw back his head and laughed out loud. "You are too delicious!" he said. "So you think it's better to pay one big compliment than to divide your favours? Still I don't see that Maude has any special claim. Don't you think I'm as nice? I'm going to be your brother, you know."

If the Brownie did not know, it was not for lack of telling.

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“Yes,” she said politely. “When are you going to marry Belle, Lord Bay?”

“Very soon now — next month. But you must n’t call me Lord Bay, Brownie. I am Lionel to *you*.”

The Brownie’s face looked troubled. She never could help feeling that she was taking a liberty in calling people by their Christian names on a brief acquaintance.

“Belle says I am to be one of the bridesmaids,” she remarked, hoping to distract his thoughts.

“Ah, yes; so you are. Now I want to consult you about the presents. The bridegroom always gives the bridesmaids presents, you know. What would you like best?”

The Brownie was saved replying by the appearance of her next partner, who began to joke Lord Bay upon having hidden himself and her in the darkest and farthest corner.

“But I was not to be done,” he added. “It’s no use, Bay — no use.”

“We are not at all glad to see you,” Lord Bay retorted. He had drawn his chair close to the Brownie’s and assumed a confidential air as he



“ ‘I COULD N’T CARRY THEM *ALL*, YOU SEE.’ ”

began to talk about the presents, which made her rather glad than otherwise to see Captain Lascelles. But she smiled at Lord Bay as she took the Captain's arm, and he promptly took it as acquiescence in his assertion.

"Never mind, we have another dance later on," he said in a congratulatory tone.

"I suppose I shall *have* to call him Lionel, then," thought the Brownie uneasily, as she went away. "Would you put my flowers somewhere safe, please, Captain Lascelles?" she said aloud.

"Certainly. What lovely roses! Will you give me one if I ask very prettily?"

"But you can't wear it in uniform," objected the Brownie, as they fell into step.

"Wear it! Wear a flower *you* gave me for half the vulgar crowd to see!" he returned, with languid extravagance. "Not I. I should put it in my waistcoat pocket, as near my heart as possible, and keep it for ever," etc., etc., etc.

The Brownie danced with many men that night, and they mostly said the same things. Now and then she skilfully coaxed them into talking what she called "sense," but they almost invariably com-

plimented her on her frock and her appearance, and pretended to be jealous of each other, or to quarrel with her, and then complained to Lady Lorraine that she was a hard-hearted little coquette. Mamma's silvery laugh rang out merrily as she said "Oh, Brownie!" but the Brownie's melancholy smile was hardly suggestive of the character they gave her.

Perhaps she enjoyed her dances with Major Maude as well as any: he was very strong, and almost carried her off her feet, but he did not speak while dancing, and but little while they sat out. He seemed absorbed and absent, and there was a suppressed excitement in his manner, but this caused him to leave the Brownie to herself, and she was thankful for the rest.

She was standing with him in the doorway for a minute, as a dance was just beginning, when a tall, dark girl came across the room alone and spoke to her. She was a handsome child, about twelve years old, and her face was quite strange to the Brownie, who regarded her with some distress.

"You are Hero Lorraine, are n't you?" said the child, rather abruptly.

"Yes," said the Brownie gently, who was unlearned in the ways of childish introductions, and did not see what this could portend.

"I am Reine Errol," announced the girl, in the same off-hand manner. "My brother wants to dance with you. May I introduce him? There he is — across there."

The Brownie looked in the direction indicated, and saw the same boy, dressed as a Toreador, whom she had vaguely noticed at the beginning of the evening. He was taller than his sister, and looked about thirteen or fourteen, a graceful effective figure in his Spanish dress, with a curly head, which he carried rather haughtily, and a little air of being slightly bored which struck the Brownie as odd in any one who was not grown-up. They were evidently a good-looking family, for this young gentleman was undeniably handsome.

"I don't know if I have a dance left," said the Brownie courteously. "But please introduce him, and I will dance with him if I can." She added to the Major, "Would you wait a minute, please? I have to speak to a boy," as Reine Errol crossed the room and returned with her brother.

“Miss Lorraine, this is my brother, Lord Bertie Errol,” said the young lady, after which she turned away and left the Brownie to grapple with the situation.

“May I have a dance?” Lord Bertie asked, with a slight drawl. It sounded so little what she expected from a boy, that the Brownie looked up at him rather puzzled. He was gazing at her with a steadiness which surprised her still more.

“What a curious *boy!*” she thought, as she surveyed her programme. “I have one dance left,” she said, handing her card to him. He wrote something on it — the Brownie on referring afterwards found that he had simply put “Bertie” — and gave it back to her with a slight bow. He was perfectly graceful, and not at all stiff, as he did so; but it all seemed so grown up and unnatural to the Brownie that she felt rather relieved to waltz away with Major Maude. Grown-up people were inexplicable sometimes to her mind, but she had always put it down to their being grown up; when a boy looked and behaved like that it was dreadful.

“I wonder if that is what the Duke means when he says that he hates boys who ape men?” she



“ HE WROTE SOMETHING ON IT . . . AND GAVE IT BACK TO
HER WITH A SLIGHT BOW.”

thought gravely. "I don't like that boy — much."

Lord Bertie came for his dance with a promptitude which made the Brownie's last partner grumble. She had been dancing with Lord Bay again, and was wondering when her next partner would put an end to their *tête-à-tête*; but when she saw that it was this particular one of her few boy-partners, her heart sank again. Lord Bertie took his predecessor's chaff with perfect good-nature; they were evidently old acquaintances, for the Brownie noticed that he said, "You could n't expect to be in *all* the time, Bay!" and Lord Bay returned, "It'll be a drawn game yet, Bertie!"

Lord Bertie waltzed perfectly, and the Brownie ought to have felt more at home with a partner nearer her own height; but something jarred on her. She could not tell what it was — whether to put it down to his lordship's devotedly languid manner, or his way of saying "Shall we go and sit on the stairs?" or else a flying sentence which she caught as they wended their way thither after the dance was over. Such a crowd of children were pushing their way through the doorway that the Brownie and her

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partner had to stand still. Then she saw that her mother was just beside her, talking to a younger lady whom she knew only slightly.

“Oh yes,” this girl was saying, “that is Lord Bertie Errol. He is the nicest boy I know — Mamma says we all spoil him, and he ought to be detestable. But he is n't. He is a perfect little cavalier, and a devoted slave of mine. I would rather talk to Bertie than to most of the men I know.”

“Has he been dancing with Brownie?”

“Oh, that is quite a case! He has been trying to get introduced all the evening. I must ask the Brownie how she dares to cut me out. Bertie has no eyes or ears for any one else!”

The Brownie's discomfort was complete. But she guessed that her partner had not heard, he being on the further side. She felt humiliated and annoyed, and was possessed with a desire to drop the boy's arm and run away, instead of which she seated herself on the stairs with an added sedateness, and looked steadily away over the heads and headdresses of the merry crowd below her. They were on the top stair of the flight; the Brownie had paused

half-way and said, "Won't this do?" but Lord Bertie had replied, "Oh, let's go up a little higher — won't you?" and she had rather unwillingly complied. She would have preferred to have sat in the midst of the children, and not to have made



"THEY WERE ON THE TOP STAIR."

herself in the least exceptional for the older people to notice.

Lord Bertie began to talk, and revealed a phase of the Juvenile World hitherto outside the Brownie's experience. At first he chatted to her quite naturally, if in rather too self-possessed a way, about

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Eton, and Lord's, and other boyish subjects; but the Brownie did not get over her strong feeling of distaste, though she could not have found where the fault lay. She had lately, from the Duke's conversation and the Duchess's tales of her nieces and nephews, set up a standard for children in her own mind, and she was rather rigid in her views respecting it. No one guessed how intensely she puzzled over questions of life and — I had almost said morality, but perhaps sociality is a better word; for being a very quiet child and reserved by education, she did not talk of it, and only occasionally startled her governess by propounding questions of right and wrong with which that lady was totally unable to cope. Hitherto the Brownie had not been able to compare herself with other children, knowing none; even now she did it at second-hand; but she was very firm and decided in her views as to what was rational and appropriate for children, unconsciously drawing her conclusions from her own sad experience. It was not natural for boys and girls to try to be grown up before their time; such things came soon enough and were terrible and miserable. The Brownie bore

with it when men made mock love to her because she needs must — it was a thing to be put wearily on one side as soon as possible, and only endured. But her whole soul revolted against the same thing in miniature, as exemplified in Lord Bertie Errol.

Lord Bertie had speedily dropped indifferent topics and with some skill adopted a more personal tone. He startled the Brownie by informing her how often she and Miss Price had walked in the Park that week : it appeared that he rode in the Row nearly every morning, in the hope of seeing — his friends, he said adroitly, his sentimental glance meeting the grave displeasure in the eyes the Brownie turned upon him quickly. She understood his insinuation, but if he really went in the Park to meet her, she decided to beguile Miss Price in another direction. Lord Bertie was home from Eton owing to an epidemic of fever, but the Brownie devoutly hoped that he would soon be able to return to his studies. She tried snubbing him gently, but he only looked amused and slightly reproachful. Then she made a desperate effort to talk on impersonal subjects — cricket, to begin

with — whereat he immediately asked her, if she would go to Lord's this year if he sent her tickets.

“ I don't know. I think I should like to, if some one would take me,” she replied, afraid to refuse lest it should be rude.

“ Oh, I will coax Lady Lorraine into taking you, if you would really care to come,” he said confidently — he knew his own powers. “ I shall look forward to the match now ! ”

The Brownie declined to see the compliment.

“ I wonder if the Duke and Duchess have come ? ” she remarked irrelevantly.

“ The Duke of Rosborough ? ” he asked, picking up the Brownie's bouquet as he lounged beside her, and playing with the white roses.

“ Yes. He's a great friend of mine.”

“ I'm glad of that,” said Lord Bertie, looking down at the little figure beside him with a half-patronising devotion. “ He is my uncle. Do you go to Rosborough House ? ”

“ Oh yes ; often. Sometimes twice a week. Is the Duke really your uncle ? ”

“ Yes, really. He is a jolly old fellow, is n't he ? ”

I didn't know *you* knew them. I must go and look them up, I think. What day do you generally go?"

"Oh, no particular day," said the Brownie cautiously. "I wonder —"

Then she paused. She had been going to say, "I wonder why I have never heard them speak of you, for I know the names of so many of their nephews and nieces," but she stopped herself with a flash of comprehension. She was sure that this boy was not among the Duke's favourites or the Duchess's either. He was too spoiled and too affected. Not that Lord Bertie was unmanly, but he was a most modern production in that he certainly "aped the ways of his elders" — a thing the Duke abominated. His parents were dead, as the Brownie discovered later, and an indiscriminating grandmother had done her best to make him precocious during the holidays; while at Eton he was the moving spirit of a clique which, without lacking physical distinction, was mentally advanced to an objectionable degree. The Brownie's instinct, which at least was neither stunted nor unhealthy, detected the atmosphere of unreality and forwardness about

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him, and she resented it with all the strength of her nature.

She heard the next dance strike up with greater relief than ever before, and insisted on descending to the dancing-room at once, despite Lord Bertie's persuasions to her to let her next partner find her.

"I think your dress is the most effective, and certainly the prettiest here, Miss Lorraine," he said, as they went slowly down the stairs.

"I am not Miss Lorraine — that is Belle," said the Brownie.

"Then what am I to call you?"

"I suppose you had better say Brownie," she replied rather reluctantly.

"Well, of course I would much rather! May I really?" he said promptly, bending down with an air of open love-making that exasperated the Brownie.

"Please, Lord Bertie, don't —" she was beginning, when her eyes fell on her mother, who was standing below her talking to Archie and Major Maude and one or two more men. Lady Lorraine was evidently pointing out her daughter and Lord Bertie to the group, and they were all laughing and looking very much amused. The Brownie's face

crimsoned and she caught her breath, feeling inclined to cry with the self-consciousness forced upon her. And unfortunately they had reached the foot of the stairs, and Lord Bertie's next speech was distinctly audible.

“ Oh, you must n't call me by my title if I call you Brownie ! ” he said, putting his arm half round her to guide her through the crowd. “ Won't you say Bertie ? ”

The Brownie twisted herself free and almost ran into the supper-room, wishing she had not heard her mother's mocking comment.

“ Really, I feel quite uncomfortable ! Let us run away, Major Maude, before we overhear any more. He will be going to Sir Charles next ! ”

But inside the supper-room there was a rescue for the Brownie: the Duke of Rosborough — in hunting dress, pink coat, top boots, and all — was standing by the sideboard talking to his host, and looking as if he appreciated the glass of champagne in his hand very much indeed. The Brownie's heart gave a bound of relief, and her feet seemed to follow it, for in two seconds she was by the Duke's side.

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“Why, here’s the Brownie!” he exclaimed at once, putting down his glass that he might take the small hand held out to him. “And what a Brownie! a true fairy, wand and all. Why, she looks radiant, does n’t she, Lorraine?”

The Brownie stood between the two feeling suddenly safe and happy, and drawing long breaths of relief. She was flushed with excitement and pleasure as she clung to the Duke’s hand and looked up at her father.

“Yes, certainly, she looks very well to-night. As a rule she is paler than children generally are, I fancy. You *are* very well, are n’t you?” Sir Charles asked, regarding the small figure gravely.

The Brownie felt rather surprised that he should know how she looked generally, for during those interviews in the hall he had not appeared to observe her much. She was prevented answering by Lord Bertie, who had followed her in, and asked her solicitously over her shoulder what he might get her to eat and drink. The sudden nearness of his handsome curly head bent down to her own made the Brownie start and shrink, and the Duke turn round.

“How d’ye do, my boy?” he said kindly; but the Brownie detected a rather forced ring in the greeting, hearty though it was. “What are you doing up from Eton at this time of the year?”

“Well, Uncle, the little fellows most obligingly got a fever scare among them, so we were drafted home, and I came in for an extra fortnight’s vac. Very glad I did too!” His eyes met the Brownie’s for an instant, and eloquently explained his meaning. She tightened her clasp of the Duke’s hand unconsciously.

“That’s a handsome lad,” remarked Sir Charles, as Lord Bertie pushed his way through the crowd in search of champagne and ices. “Is he your partner?” he added to the Brownie.

“He *was*,” she replied, firmly determined to mark the limit of Lord Bertie’s claim to her attention, “for that last dance. He is Lord Bertie Errol.”

“One of your nephews?” said Sir Charles questioningly to the Duke.

“My heir — poor George’s son,” returned his Grace briefly.

The Brownie understood from his tone that he

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regretted Lord Bertie being his heir, and she did not wonder. When that young gentleman returned with the champagne the Duke was asking after Master Pinnock.

“I expected to see him dressed up in blue ribbons!” he said, laughing.

“Oh, he wouldn’t like that!” explained the Brownie gravely. “But he had supper with me before it all began, and I expect he’s asleep on my bed. I wouldn’t bring him into *this*!” she added with a sigh.

“Who is Master Pinnock — another admirer? What a coquette you are, Brownie!” Lord Bertie joined in.

The Brownie’s chin went half an inch higher, and she regarded him with intense disfavour.

“Master Pinnock is a cat,” she said quietly, but in a tone which brought a queer smile to her father’s lips and made the Duke’s eyes twinkle.

“One for you, Bertie!” he said; but his lordship was not at all nonplussed.

“Are you fond of cats?” he asked. “I shall send you a Persian as a peace-offering — then perhaps you won’t be so hard on me. Lady Lorraine,

I'm so glad you've come just in time; I want to send the Brownie a Persian kitten. May she have it?"

"Certainly!" was the laughing answer. "I believe there is a nursery cat, but that is soon disposed of. Brownie, Major Maude says this is his dance, and you are wasting half of it."

The Major looked down rather wonderingly as he offered his arm to his small partner, for the hand she laid upon it was trembling, and her face had gone white and almost tragic. There was something like agony in the eyes which looked away past him as he guided her slowly down the long room. Yet he had fancied that she liked dancing with him.

"What is the matter, little one?" he asked at last, and he spoke very gently.

"Nothing — at least, something — only I can't tell you now. I will some time."

He had to be satisfied with that, but he wondered over the Brownie's unusual silence. She talked to him easily as a rule, though she never chattered as children are supposed to do, nor wearied him with uninteresting babble — she had been too well

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trained for that. He could not know that the Brownie's thoughts were distracted from him by miserable fear for an older friend.

"There is a nursery cat, but that is soon disposed of!" Lady Lorraine had said. In the lightly spoken words, in the smile turned on Lord Bertie, the Brownie had read Master Pinnock's doom. Her experience in the case of Muriel Erne had warned her of what was to come; no fuss, no useless crying, no possible appeal against the decree which would quietly remove this thing she loved out of her life to make way for something "more desirable." A Persian kitten would be more picturesque—it would be so pretty to see her playing with it—the Brownie could almost hear her mother's voice saying it. As to her own choice, her own inclination—in this case her own passionate despair—that did not count for anything. It never had. She was just a big doll to be dressed and undressed; her personality was merely contained in her picturesqueness—horrible word, that limited her existence on every side! For the first time the Brownie felt bitter against Fate. Her hopeless acceptance of the inevitable was turned to

furious anger and indignation; she felt that her philosophy was shattered, and this one thing she could not bear. Sobs of terror and excitement rose in her throat, her overwrought nerves avenging themselves for the long strain of the past hours. She dared not cry, but she could not speak. No wonder Major Maude found her silent.

The remainder of the party was a nightmare haunted by visions of finding Master Pinnock already gone when she went up to bed. The guests would not be quick enough; she shook hands with them one by one, with outward courtesy but inward impatience. She heard the Duke, as in a dream, say, "She looks very tired," and the Duchess add that she wished she could take her away with her into the country next week — but it all seemed a dream. Dreamlike, too, Lord Bay's laughing protest that he was to be married in a fortnight, and the Brownie was chief bridesmaid and could not be spared; then Lord Bertie's lingering farewell, and whispered words not to forget him, and something about seeing her in the Park next day. The Brownie's unreasoning dislike amounted to hatred as she met his dark eyes and realised that to him

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she owed the present anxiety and probable grief in the future.

She was so thankful — so thankful when they were all gone, and Archie carried her upstairs to bed with her soft brown head drooping on to his shoulder, to be undressed by Nurse. She was too worn out and sick to think any more, and realised nothing until Nurse laid her in her small bed, and remarking that she would “sleep without rocking to-night,” took away the light without further ceremony. Then something moved in the room, and before she could rouse herself to be frightened a heavy body leaped on to the bed, two strong paws were prodding her chest, and Master Pinnock lay down full length beside her, with the deep guttural purr in his throat which was his greatest expression of pleasure, and his big flat head pushed up into her arms.

He was not gone yet. In sudden and intense relief the Brownie gathered him close to her, folding his heavy body against her heart, and hiding her face in the pillow to stifle the choking sobs which shook her. Pinnock would not like her hot tears raining on his head, and besides, if she cried

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much Nurse would see the stains on her face to-morrow. It was no good saying why she had cried, and the wound was too sore to bear touching at present.

It was only a little girl crying over a cat. But the Brownie had centred her deepest affections in him, and not even the interest of her new friends could oust its first inmate from her heart. It was as important a thing to her as any of the greatest tragedies of the world have been to the actors in them, and her despair was as great in proportion, and far more unreasoning. In her case also there was no further appeal. The bright May morning peeping into the room found the Brownie lying white and nerveless on her pillow, in a sleep of utter exhaustion, but with no tears on her long brown lashes to tell of her secret trouble.

CHAPTER V



THE Duchess of Rosborough was away from town for a brief rest at Coombe Weald, the country house where her nieces and nephews ran riot occasionally; and the Duke was very busy in Parliament, concerned with a thing called a Bill, therefore communication with them was practically cut off from the Brownie, whose overcharged heart might otherwise have sought and found relief in confiding her fear for her four-footed friend. She spent the ensuing fortnight in a waking nightmare, sick with fear whenever she came in from her walk lest there should be no Pinnock to greet her, and nearly fretting herself ill in silence over the grey cat, whose unruffled placidity struck her as an added horror; for of course poor Pinnock ate, and slept, and ful-

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filled his duty of keeping the nursery free from mice, unconscious of his probable fate. The Brownie was always pale, so her white face escaped notice beyond the summary ordering of a tonic. She swallowed the iron and quinine obediently; but mental worry does not yield to tonics.

Her trouble was augmented by several visits from Lord Bertie. The young Etonian was equally at his ease in a drawing-room as in a cricket-field. He quickly made himself at home and useful, and was popular. Lady Lorraine encouraged him, and made merry about his devotion at the Brownie's expense; Belle and Laura petted him, and Lord Bay chaffed him, all of which he took with unfailing good-nature. Lord Bay also teased the Brownie about her latest conquest, until she learned to tremble and shake while Nurse dressed her for the drawing-room lest Lord Bertie should be in it when she reached there. In her calmer moments, when five o'clock was far away, or her young admirer had not appeared for some days, she schooled herself to future indifference, and argued that Lord Bertie did not mean to be unkind — which was quite true — and that she ought rather to like talking to him, as

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he was not grown up but nearer her own age. But assuredly as she came face to face with the boyish Adonis the old revulsion returned. The lover-like manner which she felt that he adopted in imitation of the men round him, the half-patronising tenderness towards herself which she could not avert, awoke rigid disapproval in the Brownie's mind. She disliked him for himself; she hated him when she remembered that he was Pinnock's foe. It never occurred to her to ask him privately not to send her the kitten. He had several times referred to it, and assured her that he had not forgotten; and had the Brownie appealed to him or given him her confidence—and she would willingly have made the effort for Pinnock's sake—he would undoubtedly have done exactly as she wished. But the enforced habit of enduring speechlessly whatever was thrust upon her prevented such a course entering her head; and she nearly worried herself into a low fever in consequence.

The Sunday after the fancy ball was the Brownie's eighth birthday; the day falling on a Sunday had prevented the festivities from taking place on the actual date. It brought with it a host of presents

(for which the poor bewildered little girl began to think she had to kiss everybody after the acceptance of the tenth, and the universally imposed fine) and a great many state

visits to the nursery, besides an awful hour in the drawing-room when Archie guided her hand with a large knife clasped in it to cut the pink and white cake which had come from Buzzard's. One bright gleam in the day there was



“ARCHIE GUIDED HER HAND WITH A
LARGE KNIFE.”

when a beautiful fairy-book appeared mysteriously in the nursery with her father's love; it was “The Story of Prince Ritto,” illustrated with splendid photographs. The Brownie valued it as a more personal and private gift than the pony which Sir Charles ostensibly contributed, though she liked the

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latter very much and would have enjoyed learning to ride him in the days which followed, had she not been haunted by her fears for Master Pinnock every time she went out with the groom as teacher. Lord Bay gave her a riding-whip, a pretty gold-mounted toy, and Belle and Laura a little rocking-chair, and Mamma two lovely gold bangles, and Archie a tiny clock to stand on the mantelpiece in the night-nursery, and Vivian a big edition of Don Quixote with Doré's illustrations, until — oh dear! the Brownie grew confused with thanking them all. The Duke and Duchess sent her a rocking-horse — the Brownie very seldom received real toys — and Major Maude an Indian silver belt. These two the Brownie remembered and distinguished from the mass; also the little ring with turquoises set as forget-me-nots which came from Lord Bertie, and which, pretty though it was, she accepted with absolute reluctance. It seemed to the Brownie a very impressive and overpowering day, wherein people made more inexplicable speeches and laughed at her rather more than usual; and she laid it by in her memory as second only in dread to that of the fancy ball. Most of the milestones of her life were set up in this way.

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A week had passed after her birthday before she summoned up courage to make an unprecedented effort for the deliverance of Master Pinnock. He was more affectionate than usual one day, placid indifference being a marked trait in his character, and the Brownie's heart was lacerated in consequence. She was dressed and sent down to the drawing-room about five as usual; but even when helping Sir Charles on with his coat she was absent-minded and very silent, and conversation in the drawing-room became an effort — the more so because Belle and Laura were both away, Belle staying with relations of Lord Bay's, and Laura on another important visit, the Hon. Elliot Gifford being a fellow-guest with her. So being bereft of the help of her step-daughters, Lady Lorraine brought the Brownie into greater prominence than ever, until her curly head ached, and tears nearly welled up into her patient brown eyes. The Brownie was thankful when all the guests had departed except Major Maude; he had taken to staying on sometimes beyond the other visitors, of which she was glad, as she liked him in a quiet fashion.

“What's the matter, Brownie?” he said suddenly,

lifting her up as she stood beside him, and looking intently into her grave little face. "You are very white and silent — is there anything wrong?"

"I think the heat tries her," Lady Lorraine said carelessly. She was standing opposite the Major on the tiger-skin which served as a hearthrug, leaning one arm on the mantelshelf, and swinging a hand-



"A BIG EDITION OF DON QUIXOTE."

screen of brilliant feathers to and fro idly, and she did not glance at her daughter as she spoke.

"Nothing, thank you," answered the Brownie, with a little sigh from her aching heart. "At least, nothing that matters."

It mattered to her materially, but she fully comprehended how unimportant it was to grown-up people.

The Major set her on the ground gently; but he still played with her hair in an absent fashion as she stood beside him.

"Can't you tell me?" he said. His eyes had strayed away to that beautiful figure opposite.



“ ‘WHY, BROWNIE,’ SHE SAID, WITH A CURIOUS QUIVER IN HER
GAY VOICE, ‘WHAT ARE ALL THE TEARS ABOUT?’ ”

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“Yes, of course I can *tell* you,” said the Brownie quietly. “But you would n’t think it much. It is only” — she looked appealingly towards her mother — “that I *don’t want* a Persian kitten, or — or indeed *any* cat!”

The subdued passion and the earnestness in her voice caught the attention of both her hearers. Major Maude looked down at her with an honestly puzzled expression, while Lady Lorraine turned round with a smile beginning to curve her lips.

“Why, Brownie!” she said, “don’t you like pussy-cats?”

“Oh yes, very much!” answered the Brownie truthfully. “Only not instead of Master Pinnock.”

“Who is Master Pinnock?” asked the Major kindly, taking her hand in his and holding it closely. “Come, I knew there was a trouble — tell us all about it!”

“Please,” began the Brownie, her words coming hurriedly in her eagerness, and the sobs which excitement and worry had made it almost impossible to check threatening to prevent the explanation, “Master Pinnock is our cat — he is always in the nursery — we have had him quite two years. I

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think he was born in the kitchen, but he soon came upstairs. And he sleeps on my bed — and he's my friend — a *very old* friend — and Mamma said if Lord Bertie gave me a Persian kitten Pin would — would" — (the sobs were getting more and more difficult to fight) "would be got rid of — and — oh dear! I can't bear it."

The last words were unnaturally soft, the child making a wild effort to hold her breath and stop the sobs. It struck through the absorbed selfishness of her audience with an uncomfortable shock. Grown-up beings who have taught themselves to suffer in silence might show just such self-control, but children cry loudly and heartily as a rule — not as the Brownie was doing, with the tears streaming down her face, but each sob fought against and resisted.

"So," said the Major at last, in an odd tone, "Pinnock is an older friend, and you don't want him superseded!"

He looked down at the Brownie for an instant, then his eyes met Lallage Lorraine's for one compelling moment.

"Let her stick to her first love while she will,

Lallage!" he said, with a sudden energy of bitterness. "Such constancy is not a very frequent feminine trait!"

Lady Lorraine's eyes wavered and drooped. With an impulsive movement she knelt down beside the Brownie and drew her into her arms. "Why, Brownie," she said, with a curious quiver in her gay voice, "what are all the tears about? Of course you need n't have the new kitten if you prefer your favourite cat. We will tell Lord Bertie not to send it."

She kept her lowly position on the rug in front of Major Maude, fondling the child in a restless, pre-occupied fashion, while the Brownie leaned against her, exhausted with the tempest of her tears and the sudden relief of finding that she had compassed Pinnock's salvation. She was dreamily conscious of being grateful to Major Maude, too, as a factor in her success, and stretched out her hand to him, as he stood towering above them, looking down on the picture they made. He took the child's hand in both of his and grasped it so tightly that he nearly made the Brownie cry out with pain. It was just at that moment, also, that Mamma kissed her

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almost passionately, and then, before her tired little brain could get clear of its bewilderment, Major Maude had stooped and somehow lifted them both up, and had taken the Brownie into his arms with her head lying wearily on his shoulder. But she was too faint and too giddy with the unlooked-for removal of her trouble to realise any more, and was half unconscious when the Major carried her upstairs back to the nursery. She observed without understanding that Nurse and the under-housemaid eyed him oddly as he came in, and caught a scrap of conversation while she was undressed that night that made her wonder.

“That Major’s becoming something more than a tame cat about the house,” said Nurse, primming up her lips.

“Her maid says that he was something more than a tame cat before my lady married!” said Annie knowingly. “She took the old man because of his title and the money, everybody knows that. And they do say —”

“Well,” said Nurse, with a vicious tweak to the Brownie’s nightgown, “as long as it’s only *say* and not *do*, Annie, we may thank our stars! But I



“‘AS LONG AS IT’S ONLY SAY AND NOT DO.’”

wonder as how her old lover can have the face to make a fuss with *his* child !”

The Brownie’s brain was too tired to disentangle the pronouns: she hugged the rescued Master Pinnock and slept off her late anxiety.

Lord Bertie must have been warned that his gift would be superfluous, for no unwelcome kitten made its appearance, nor did he himself refer to it when he met the Brownie at the Eton and Harrow Cricket match, as she had half feared that he would. The Brownie had never been to Lord’s before, and enjoyed it very much in a sedate and dignified fashion, all the more because the Duke and Duchess were present. True, Lord Bertie lingered near her party as much as possible, and was more audacious than ever in his efforts at flirtation, being on his own ground, so to speak. But as he was playing in the match, the Brownie was spared his society for part of the time.

She was watching the game with grave interest, unheeding the chatter going on between her mother and sisters and the men who had escorted them, when she saw the Duke coming towards her with a boy of about eleven or twelve years. He was quite a nice

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boy, she decided at once, looking at his quizzical freckled face and red hair; he was not at all handsome, like Lord Bertie for instance, but that was rather a recommendation in the Brownie's eyes, and he was talking to the Duke with an unaffected eagerness which attracted the Brownie. She regarded the couple with much interest.



“HE WAS PLAYING IN
THE MATCH.”

“Hullo!” exclaimed the Duke, catching sight of her, “how are you getting on, Brownie?”

“Very well, thank you, Duke,” replied the Brownie. “Didn’t that last boy bowl well?” She was already profiting by her study of the game.

“First rate,” replied his Grace heartily. “He is a friend of Bertie’s too. But Ready can tell you all about him — this is my nephew, Ethelred Laneton, of whom I have told you. Ready, this is Miss Brownie Lorraine!”

The boy pulled off his cap, but the Brownie held out her hand. "I am very glad to know you," she said, with her usual self-possession. "I have heard about you so often."

The boy did not answer the courteous little speech, but stood looking rather embarrassed, after the manner of boys. But he remained beside the Brownie, even after the Duke moved away, and she hoped that he was inclined to be friendly. "Are you playing in the match to-day?" she asked, noticing that he wore the Eton colours.

"No, but my cousin is, Lord Bertie Errol," said the boy, turning his bright face towards her. "Do you like cricket?"

"Very much, but I've never been to a match till now.

"You can't play then?" he asked, with a somewhat doubtful glance at her.

The Brownie shook her head. "I live in London," she explained. "There wouldn't be anywhere to play, even if they would let me."

"My sisters can play — jolly well, too, for girls," said Ready with off-hand acknowledgment. "And Reine Errol used, only she's getting too young-

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ladyish now, and is afraid to run. Do you know her?"

"Yes; at least I've seen her. She came to my party," said the Brownie. Then she added rather shyly, "I wish you had come too!"



"I'm not much good at dancing," said Ready, but he looked pleased. "Bertie's the chap for that. He waltzes better than half the big fellows."

"I know," said the Brownie quietly. "Lord Bertie often comes to see us."

"I suppose you think no end of him. All girls do," said Ready in a conclusive tone. He did not seem to set much value on feminine preference himself.

"I like you better!" said the Brownie frankly.

"Oh, come now!" said the boy, laughing and reddening. "Don't try to gull me like that!"

"SHE WAS WATCHING
THE GAME WITH
GRAVE INTEREST."

The Brownie was rather distressed. She did not know what "gull" meant, but she saw that he did not believe her.

"Lord Bertie always talks as if he were grown up," she explained in self-defence. "It's so silly, because he is n't."

"Well, most girls think it's a fine thing to be grown up," Ready said. He agreed with the Brownie in his heart, but he was bound to defend his kinsman. "Would n't you like to be a young lady and go to balls every night and not do lessons? Come now!"

"I'd rather be a child!" said the Brownie, who had never been allowed to be one.

Ready stared at her. "Well, you are a queer little girl!" he remarked with open amusement.

The Brownie sighed. "That's just what everybody says," she thought. "They all laugh at me, but I don't see how I can be any different."

"Are you coming to Coombe Weald this year?" asked the boy. "Aunt Mary is awfully fond of you, I know, and so is Uncle Tom."

"I don't know. The Duchess has n't asked me," said the Brownie; but there was distinct hope

in her tone. She usually spent a month or so at the seaside while Mamma and everybody else went abroad, during which period Nurse spent half her time in frustrating the Brownie's aspirations after crabs, and nipping all friendships in the bud which her charge tried to begin with other children. The thought of Coombe Weald and its party of young people, with the Duke and Duchess for her host and hostess, sounded to the Brownie like a dream of happiness too great to be realised.

"Oh, I expect they'll ask you," said Ready. "Look here, if you come I'll teach you to play cricket! But you mustn't mind a few knocks."

"Oh, thank you!" said the Brownie gratefully. "I should n't mind the knocks at all." She parted with Ready quite regretfully — it was he who held out his hand this time — and told the Duke afterwards that she liked him very much.

"I wish he would come sometimes with Lord Bertie," she said.

"Ready does n't get so many holidays as Bert," said the Duke drily. "He's got a father who prefers him to stick to his books in Term, and gives him a good time in Vac. Laneton is a sensible

man. Never mind, my dear, you shall see Ready again some day."

The Brownie was left wondering why a short-sighted Providence had deprived Lord Bertie of a father. "Perhaps," she thought charitably, "it is that that makes him so very nasty!" And she was more attentive than ever to Sir Charles that day.

CHAPTER VI



LAURA came back from her visit triumphant. She was engaged to the Hon. Elliot Gifford, and now there were two future brothers to claim privileges from the Brownie. The Hon. Elliot was as often at the house as Lord Bay, but the Brownie found it easier to get on with him.

He was very tall and compact, and he almost invariably wore a very long frock-coat which fitted him closely, and a high white collar which threatened to cut his head off. The Brownie used to wonder if the collar were the cause of his speaking very slowly and saying “er” between his words a good deal. He generally smiled at her as if he found her as great an entertainment as every one else did; but his sense of humour lay chiefly in talking to her very gravely on learned subjects, which he chose

intentionally to be over her head, and then detailing her replies for the benefit of the company afterwards, and the Brownie found this preferable to Lord Bay's incessant banter. The Hon. Elliot had just received an appointment in the Diplomatic Service which would take him abroad, and he wanted to be married immediately and to take his wife out with him; so it was arranged that there should be a double wedding, and Belle and Laura would leave their home together. The Brownie was to be Belle's chief bridesmaid, which entailed more trying on and planning of costumes, and as she could not fulfil the same office for Laura, Elliot's sister undertook it. Miss Gifford was grown up, but Laura preferred her to having another child to match her step-sister.

"As I can't have the Brownie," she said, "I won't put up with a mere imitation!" The Brownie was happiest just about this time when she was safely out of the dressmakers' hands and had done with Miss Price, for then came her daily ride in the Park on the brown pony — named "Prince Ritto" after her father's other gift — during which she generally met the Duke. His Grace rode a big bay horse which he told the Brownie was a "weight

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carrier,” and it was a fine sight to see the burly gentleman with the little girl beside him, both engrossed in each other and the exercise to the exclusion of the outside world. The Duke gave the Brownie many hints, too, which helped wonderfully, for he was an authority on equine subjects and a Master of Hounds to boot.

She generally told Sir Charles about her morning ride when she met him at tea-time lingering about the hall, though it had grown far too hot for a great-coat, and there was no occasion for her to help him.

“I met Lord Bay this morning,” she said, about a week before the weddings, “and he rode with me for some time, asking me about the presents for the bridesmaids. He wanted me to decide: do you think it would be in good taste?”

She spoke with perfect clearness and deliberation, bringing out the phrase in a way which made Sir Charles open his eyes.

“Why should n’t it be?” he asked. “Have n’t you good taste?”

“Oh, I don’t mean that!” said the Brownie. “I daresay I could decide as well as Lady Alice or Miss Gifford. Only, you see, I’m the littlest

bridesmaid though I'm the chiefest, and I thought perhaps they ought to have first choice."

"Oh, I see." A smile was gathering among the wrinkles of Sir Charles' face as he contemplated the "chiefest bridesmaid" before him. "Well, I think as Bay left it to you to decide you had better do as he asked you. What would you rather have yourself?"

"Well, I'd *rather* have a ring, but Belle says that's rather unusual for the bridegroom to give. If I can't have that, I think I should like a brooch — you see, I have so many bangles already!"

The Brownie sighed as if the weight of her possessions rather distressed her, and Sir Charles sighed also as his gaze rested on her grave little face.

"Don't you have any dolls?" he said. "Children generally like dolls better than trinkets — or they should do."

"I expect it's 'should' then," said the Brownie wisely. "Of course I would rather have the bangles than toys — they're real, and the others are not. There are a lot of dolls up in the nursery; they are beautiful dolls, and I used to play with them when I was quite little, but I have n't cared

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about them much since I had Pinnock, and I like reading better.”

There was a minute's pause, while Sir Charles put a hesitating hand on her head and touched her hair awkwardly, as if the sensation of offering any caress were strange to him.

“The Duke sent his love to you!” said the Brownie suddenly.

“Eh?” said Sir Charles, starting.

“I saw him quite at the end, just before we left the Park,” explained the Brownie. “We were waiting for the Princess. He said, ‘Remember me to your father,’ so I suppose he meant me to give you his love.”

“Thank you very much,” said Sir Charles gravely. “It was very kind of him. Did you see the Princess?”

“Oh yes, and I was so glad! Isn't she pretty? I am never tired of seeing the Princess. I always pray for her and the Prince once a week.”

“That is very loyal of you,” said Sir Charles in a puzzled tone; “but why once a week?”

“Because they are not special friends — I mean I don't know them personally. So I just put them

in on Tuesdays. Wednesday is my 'acquaintance' day, and I keep Friday for the servants. Of course my special friends come in every time."

"But I don't see why you should pray for the Prince and Princess in particular!"

"Well, you see, of course they are prayed for twice in church, but by the time we get to them in the prayers most people are so tired that they just say 'Amen!' without thinking about it, so it can't do much good. And it's not much better in the Litany. So I thought if I just said an extra prayer for them when I wasn't so tired that it might be better."

"What a very curious idea!" said Sir Charles blankly.

The Brownie was, as a fact, rather fond of going to church. Not that she was a very religious child, for beyond the usual curriculum which is taught to children she had had no one to impress her with the idea of the Deity. She knew that Mamma liked to find her kneeling in her nightgown and saying her prayers aloud, and had once or twice brought visitors up at the right moment to see, as if it were part of the daily show of her life. It had rather

grated on the Brownie's good taste and sense of the fitness of things, for if she had but little affection for her God, she had a distinct reverence for Him, and unbounded confidence in His power to "make her a good child, and keep Pinnock safe." She had read her Bible, and knew her Catechism, and was chiefly struck by the terrible punishments which appeared to follow on the slightest transgressions, and the impossible things which were promised by one's godfathers and godmothers. But, after her usual fashion, she puzzled silently, and expressed her doubts to no one. Nurse took her to church on Sundays, but the Brownie had soon discovered that she was incapable of answering any questions propounded about the service. So the child sank back into herself, and enjoyed the quiet and the hush of the sacred place, the beauty of the stained windows, and above all the music. She grew unconsciously to think that the form of worship did not much matter after all, so long as the atmosphere of sacredness was there, and would not have disturbed herself if Nurse had taken her to a Synagogue or a Mosque.

She found the important day of the weddings



“ENJOYED THE QUIET AND THE HUSH OF THE SACRED PLACE.”

somewhat of a trial to her feelings, for though she did not consider it wicked to talk out loud in church, she did consider it inappropriate. She was dressed before her step-sisters, of course, and driven to the church with three other of the bridesmaids who were all grown up. They chattered and laughed on the way there, after the manner of girls, and the Brownie sat still and smiled at them when they spoke to her; but she was momentarily surprised to find that the chattering still continued in church. The bridesmaids took their usual position each side of the aisle near the door, with the Brownie heading one long line and the Hon. Vera Gifford the other; but after a few minutes the bridegrooms appeared with their best men, and came down the church to talk to them.

“You had better come up the aisle and speak to your friends, Brownie,” Elliot said, smiling. “I know enough of these ceremonies not to expect Laura to arrive yet awhile!”

“Yes, come along,” added Lord Bay. “Bertie is nearly breaking his heart with impatience to speak to you.”

“I think I had better not move,” said the Brownie

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gently. You see I must be in my place when they come ! ”

“ Look here, we ’ll station Curties at the door to look out for the carriage, and he shall rush up and tell us when it is coming,” Lord Bay suggested, seizing on a youth who was looking rather lost. “ Curties, you go out into the porch and look for the brides’ carriage, and let us know. Come along, Brownie ! ” and whether she would or no the Brownie was carried off up the aisle to find herself in a perfect crush of people she knew.

“ What a lovely frock ! ” one lady said to her. “ Aren’t you afraid of moving lest you should hurt it ? ”

The Brownie looked down at the thick, rich folds crusted with pearl embroidery. “ I never think of it,” she said simply.

It was quite true ; she was too used to silk stockings and white slippers — even when pearl-embroidered — and beautiful materials for her frocks, to give them more than a passing thought ; and even the tiny cap with its network of pearls, which her mother had chosen in preference to a more ordinary head-gear, did not feel very strange. It



“IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO AVOID TRIPPING OVER BELLE’S TRAIN.”

was rather mediæval, certainly, and at first the Brownie could not rid herself of a fear that it would slip off, so lost was it amongst her curly hair, but she soon forgot it.

“Who gave you your bouquet?” Lord Bertie asked, with real or pretended jealousy in his voice.

“Mr. Elliot,” said the Brownie quietly. “He gave all Belle’s bridesmaids their bouquets, and Lord Bay gave all Laura’s. Of course each bridegroom gives the presents to the bridesmaids who belong to his own bride, though.”

“When are you going to be a bride, Brownie?” asked another lady, laughing. “You and Lord Bertie make a nice pair.”

The Brownie moved a step away from the boy beside her with instinctive repugnance, but he did not seem to mind.

“Oh, she is not to be teased about that yet!” he said with his superior smile — the Brownie hated that smile — “we understand each other, don’t we, Brownie?”

“Look here,” interposed Lord Bay, coming up to them, “if Belle is much later I shall marry the Brownie! Do you hear, Brownie? We will wait

five minutes more, and then you will come up to the altar with me instead ! ”

He took out his watch and pretended to regard it with a frown, which made the Brownie faintly anxious. Of course he was joking, but there were such things as child-marriages in India, and —

“ But they seemed quite ready when I started ! ” she said earnestly, and again every one laughed.

“ She does n’t care for the offer, Bay ! ” one man said ; and another added, “ Make a run for it when you see the Bishop opening his book, Miss Brownie ; we ’ll help you through. ”

“ Well, remember — ” began Lord Bay ; but to the Brownie’s relief he was interrupted by Mr. Curties rushing up the aisle to summon her.

And then there was a crash as the organ struck up, and the Brownie saw Belle coming in on Sir Charles’ arm, while the Anglo-Indian uncle whom she hardly knew followed with Laura, and the bridesmaids turned and fell in behind them, following slowly to the chancel. It was very difficult to avoid tripping over Belle’s train, and still more so to reach and take the great white bouquet which she had to hold during the service in addition to

her own. It seemed so much more impressive and important to her than it appeared to do to any one else ; in the vestry she was serious and even more thoughtful than usual, while the people who crowded round the brides laughed and chatted loudly, as if they were at a fashionable "At Home," until Lord Bay, detecting a small figure behind Belle, caught her up in his arms triumphantly.

"Here's our good fairy — our Brownie," he said, laughing. "We ought to call you the Mascot, you elf! I feel sure you bring good luck."

The Brownie wondered if anything so small and joyless as herself could bring happiness to anybody. She was rather depressed at the idea of losing Belle and Laura, and when she was riding back to her father's house in a carriage containing her mother and Major Maude and Archie, she hardly spoke at all.



" 'HERE'S OUR GOOD FAIRY.' "

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The wedding-breakfast took the usual modern form of long refreshment-tables, with the servants ranged behind them serving out champagne and sandwiches, rich sweets and galantines, to the hungry crowd who pushed backwards and forwards. The Brownie found her father and the Duke in a corner eating chicken rissoles in a most unassuming manner, and as she came up she heard Sir Charles say, —

“Two-thirds of the people do not know who I am, I am thankful to say, so it is possible that I may get something to eat in peace. It is a great thing to be the host on a day like this, Rosborough: one is absolutely the least important person present.”

The Brownie hoped that she would be allowed to remain with them, but it was not long before Lord Bertie pursued and captured her with a message from Mamma — she was to join the bridal party, who were quite at the farther end of the room. She followed the boy reluctantly, and he guided her to a small table where much fun and merriment seemed to be going on. Mamma was there and Major Maude, both the brides and bridegrooms, and Archie

as well, and the Brownie was immediately introduced into the charmed circle and told that she was to eat something or she would be faint.

“Well, what do you think of weddings, Brownie?” Archie asked. He had taken his step-sister on his knee, and was feeding her with chicken and champagne.

“They are rather noisy,” said the Brownie, pausing to look at the greedy crowd round them. “Please, I really can’t eat any more!”

“Then you must have some cake,” put in Belle. “You must taste the cake, you know. Lionel, please get Brownie some cake.”

“I hope she won’t be ill to-morrow,” said Lady Lorraine. “To do her justice, she never does make herself sick with sweets like other children; but I don’t think she cares for them much.”

“I have so many, you see,” said the Brownie absently. She was hardly attending, for she had caught a scrap of conversation between two elderly gentlemen behind her that interested her far more.

“Lorraine is safe to get it some time, if only on account of those public libraries at Market Liddiscombe and Lundy.”

“Has he endowed them?” said the other. “I didn’t know. Well, it’s a public-spirited thing, anyway.”

“I was surprised that he was not amongst those who received Birthday Honours,” said the first voice. “But perhaps there is a bigger plum waiting at the end of the session. He is well in with this Government.”

“It will be a barony, I suppose?”

“An earldom possibly — I doubt his taking a barony. The title is not a new one as it stands.”

It was not very intelligible to the Brownie, but she recognised the phrase “Birthday Honours” as one her father had used before, and about which she had since asked the Duke, who had explained it to her. Was it possible that Sir Charles was going to be made a kind of duke, like the poor tradesmen’s sons in the fairy stories who were suddenly transformed into princes? How pleased Mamma would be! She was so taken up with the idea that she hardly noticed when Belle and Laura went to change their dresses, and forgot to snub Lord Bertie, who was making the most of his chances and taking fearful liberties. She roused

herself, however, when her step-sisters came down, and every one began pelting the unfortunate pairs with rice, after the insane fashion of wedding-guests.

“Good-bye, Brownie. You must be our very first visitor,” Belle said fondly, holding the child affectionately in her arms.

She was the more emotional of the two elder girls; but they had both been very kind always, without either of them taking the trouble to think that comprehension and sympathy are sometimes more valued than mere indulgence.



“SOME ONE THREW A WHITE SLIPPER AFTER THEM.”

The Brownie choked down the lump in her throat, and hugged the new Countess in silence.

“I hope you will be very happy,” she whispered at last, with unchildlike earnestness. “And you too, Laura.”

“Good-bye, pet,” Laura answered. “Take care of Papa for us.”

And then Elliot, with an unusual demonstration

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of affection, took the Brownie in his arms — she was quite awed by such a near view of his immaculate collar — and Lord Bay turned back again from the door to kiss the serious little face again and tell her to “Cheer up! — he was going to bring Belle back soon.” And the carriage doors were shut, and some one threw a white slipper after them, and Belle and Laura were gone.

With the last glimpse of the two pretty faces still before her mental vision, the Brownie turned back into the hall. There was a queer empty feeling about her, as if she had lost something that could never return.

“It won’t ever be quite the same,” she thought.

The guests were leaving; people stood in little groups laughing and talking. The Brownie saw her mother and Major Maude standing apart, and went up to them.

“I hate weddings,” her mother was saying, with a subdued energy which startled the Brownie. “It takes me back so vividly —”

“We are going forward now — downhill very fast!” he answered, in a curious, reckless voice. “For God’s sake, Lallage, don’t look back —

unless it be to the time when you were mine before !”

Some one came up to bid Lady Lorraine good-bye and congratulate her on the way the double wedding had gone off. The Brownie drew back frightened and wondering. There was a sense of loneliness and danger in the air already.



CHAPTER VII

AFTER Belle and Laura had gone the house seemed to fall into a brooding quiet that had no rest in it. It was like a lull before a storm, and yet there was no reason to expect a storm. The season was nearly over, and there were fewer visitors, but Parliament was not prorogued until the beginning of August, so Sir Charles Lorraine's household remained in town, Lady Lorraine having nearly as many engagements as in May or June, for Society still seemed loth to call "Hold-enough!" and retire to the country or the Continent.

It was hot, enervating weather during the end of July and the beginning of August, and the Brownie began to feel limp and tired. Even her rides in the Park fatigued her, and her daily visits to the drawing-room became more and more of a penance. She looked forward to the moment when every one

should have left but Major Maude, who came almost daily now and outstayed the other visitors, for then she knew that she could sit quiet and not be expected to talk. Mamma had made her understand, in her own occult fashion, that she was to remain as long as Major Maude was there, though why her presence should be necessary the Brownie did not make the effort to think; they did not speak to her much, though they talked and argued with each other in the same incomprehensible way before her; but sometimes she did not even stay near them. The drawing-room opened into a large conservatory, and the Brownie strayed in there aimlessly, and made up stories for herself about the flowers. She had invented a romance between the white lily at the far end and the great palm next it: the lily was an enchanted princess, and the palm the prince, and it seemed to the Brownie that with each new bud the lily opened her beauty increased and the palm fell more in love. His large fan-shaped leaves were like hands spread out in wonder. She used to reach up and bend them towards each other until their leaves touched. "Now they will be happy for one day!" she said to herself.

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She was dreaming about them in her usual way one evening when she heard something that caught her attention in the room behind her. The other callers had all left, for it was getting on for seven o'clock, and only Major Maude remained; but could that be his voice raised to such imperative passion? She turned and fled back into the drawing-room with her heart beating quickly. The hot weather and want of change had overstrung her nerves, and she was unreasonably startled.

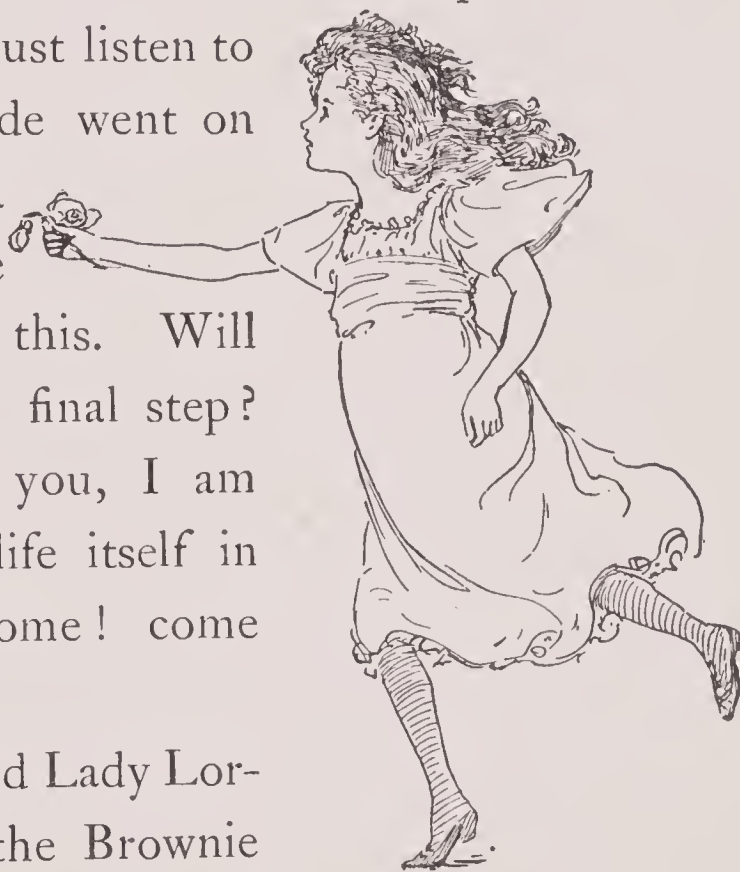
Her mother was standing in the middle of the room with her hand pressed over her heart against a cluster of roses which were fastened into her gown: the Brownie noticed how she was crushing the flowers and longed to go and pull her hand away. Her eyes looked larger than usual, and bright with excitement, and her breath came quickly. The Major faced her; his face was very pale, and he was speaking with terrible and forcible distinctness.

“We have drifted far enough!” he was saying. “We cannot draw back now. In Heaven’s name, Lallage, be truthful with me! Own that you care —”

“How dare you!” the Brownie’s mother broke in breathlessly. “How dare you suggest this — this thing to me! Because I have been friendly with you — I have let you come here — you reward me like this!”

Her voice broke with a sob, but her eyes were brighter than ever. Neither of them seemed to notice the small figure that hovered near them, quivering with a fear she could not explain.

“Lallage, you must listen to me!” Major Maude went on earnestly, moving a step nearer. “We cannot go on like this. Will you take this one final step? If I ask much of you, I am offering you my life itself in compensation. Come! come to me! I —”



“Stop!” answered Lady Lorraine’s voice, but the Brownie hardly recognised it. “Leave me now, and never mention this to me again. When you come to your senses

“BROWNIE FLED HEAD-
LONG FROM THE ROOM.”



—when you feel that you have made a mistake—you may come back—not before.”

What was it in the words that did not ring true? Lallage Lorraine had never been more beautiful than at that moment as she stood pointing to the door, a model of insulted dignity and injured innocence.

“HER MOTHER WAS SINGING.”

And yet it was like a scene in a play: she was too conscious of the good effect of her own attitude to convict even herself, and she seemed to feel that she was on the stage. Somehow the child listening knew that the man would not take such a dismissal even before he spoke.

“If I go,” he said slowly, with a look in his face that made the woman shrink as if he had gripped hold of her, “I shall go for good—or bad. If you send me away now, and tell me to come back only

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as a friend, I shall never come back. You have played fast and loose with me long enough. It must be all or nothing." There came a pause. "Well?" he said, "am I to go?"

Lady Lorraine bent her head as if in silent assent. She kept her head bent so that her face was hidden. After a second Major Maude drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders, tramping across the room and out of the door. The Brownie stood as if paralysed, listening to his steps all down the corridor. Suddenly her mother threw up her head with a gasping sob and caught sight of her standing there. A change came over her face — a flash like desperate hope across her look of miserable despair.

"Here!" she said hoarsely, "quick! take this — follow him — catch him. Go quickly — do you hear?" She dragged a rose out of her gown as she spoke; the thorns tore her hand, but she did not seem to feel them. The Brownie saw the crimson blood well up and fall on to the crimson petals as she took it, and shuddered. "Run — tell him I will do anything he wishes — the rose is with my love."

She pushed the child roughly forward so that she

almost fell, and the Brownie fled headlong from the room, down the corridor and across the hall. Major Maude had his hand on the door — the servants had heard no bell, and were not there to open it for him — when the rush of light feet arrested him.

“Mamma sends you this — with her love — she will do anything you want!” the Brownie panted, desperate with the feeling that she had nearly been too late. He looked down at the blood-stained flower thrust into his hand, and at the child’s pure face lifted to his.

“Brownie!” he stammered. “You!” and then a leisurely tread was heard approaching — one of the footmen was crossing the hall — and Major Maude opened the door hurriedly and went, closing it behind him with an unusual caution as if he shut the door of a room where some one lay dead.

The Brownie turned away also and went slowly upstairs, clinging to the banisters. She did not know why she did not return to the drawing-room, but as she reached the head of the flight she stopped short and listened blankly.

The drawing-room was open, and her mother was singing. There came a rush and ripple of notes, and

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then a voice so wildly gay that it sounded in some strange fashion infinitely sad.

“Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller ?”

sang Mamma. The Brownie wondered how she could sing, and the notes followed her up to the nursery.

“Menez-moi, dit la belle,
À la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours !
Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guerre
Au pays des amours !”

The days that followed were more airless and depressing still. The Brownie was listless and nervous ; she started at a slight noise, and was so white and heavy-eyed that on several occasions Miss Price cleared her throat and said, “I think, my dear Hero, it would be well to rest awhile now. You appear to have a headache,” which surprised her pupil in a dull fashion, but she was too thankful for the unusual relaxation to raise questions.

The heat seemed to culminate one breathless day in August. The air felt like thunder ; there was no sun, but a dull, lurid sky stretched overhead with-

out a break in the pall of cloud. The Brownie's head had really ached all day, and when Miss Price left her she sat down by the open window too weary to even read. Pinnock came and stretched himself across her knees — he seemed to feel that to curl himself up tightly was impossible in such weather — and the Brownie stroked him dreamily, gazing down into the dusty road beneath, and soothing herself unconsciously with the touch of his warm, supine body. She was glad of his company, for her nerves were on edge; she almost jumped when Annie brought in the tray with her supper, and whispered fragments of conversation between her and Nurse struck upon her ears as if she had an extra power of hearing.

“Martin saw it in the paper to-night” — Martin was the butler. “It'll be in the *Times* to-morrow.” . . . “What'll my lady say?” . . . “A Countess! . . . as grand as Miss Belle 'erself . . . think of that!” . . . “My! won't she be pleased! . . . But 'im to be Lord Chateris! my word, he did n't look much like 'Sir Charles' even!” . . . “My lady'll make him live up to the position.” . . . “Perhaps *now* she won't think so much of the

other" — this from Nurse. "High time *his* nose was put out of joint! . . . and all the world talking!"

Then the voices sank so low that the whispers were almost inaudible; but as Annie left the room she said, "They are going out together to-night, I know, because Thomas is n't to take the carriage to fetch her home."

"Well, that's no proof," said Nurse unguardedly aloud.

"Yes, it is. Major Maude often sees her home when they go to the same house. They drive back together."



"THE BROWNIE ATE HER BREAKFAST
UNDISTURBED."

The sentences rang in the Brownie's ears all night. "Lord Chateris — He did n't look much like Sir Charles — Won't my lady be pleased? — Major Maude often sees her home — And all the world talking!" And through it all she dozed lightly, or tossed to and fro, too hot to sleep, and listening, she did not know why, for the slam of the

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hall door which should mean that her mother had returned.

She rose heavy-eyed and white in the morning. She was thinking of the announcement which was to be in the *Times* that day, and was too preoccupied to notice Nurse's manner as she dressed her. The woman's hands trembled, she sniffed suspiciously once or twice, and glanced at the Brownie oddly, as though she had gained a new personality and interest.

The Brownie ate her breakfast undisturbed, however; Miss Price usually arrived as the clock struck ten, but it chimed a quarter past — half past — a quarter to eleven, and still she had not made her appearance. At eleven o'clock the Brownie was suddenly conscious of a stir in the house; people moved to and fro, doors banged; then several of the housemaids came into the nursery — an unprecedented event. They gathered round Nurse and began a confused babble of questions and answers. Nobody took any notice of the Brownie. She stood in the background, listening and piecing the sentences together, for all caution was set aside now, and there were no lowered voices.



“ ‘WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL ME,’ SAID THE BROWNIE, ‘WHAT
YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT?’ ”

“Nobody dare go near him since they took him her letter!” one of the maids said in awestruck tones. “He is quite alone—not in his study—in the dining-room. Every one has been turned away from the door—Martin had his orders as soon as it was known that she was gone.”

Suddenly a child’s clear voice broke in on their chattering.

“Would you please tell me,” said the Brownie, “what you are talking about?”

In an instant there was dead silence. The group parted and fell back on either side, the servants forming a half ring and facing the child, who stood with unconscious dignity before them. Some looked simply blank, some dismayed, some ashamed. At last Nurse spoke, with an effort, after her usual manner.

“Miss ’ero, my dear,” she said, with sudden pompousness, “you must n’t ask questions. Your Mamma has gone away for ever, and you must never speak of her again.”

The great brown eyes were lifted to her face with embarrassing effect. “Will you kindly tell me,” repeated the Brownie patiently, “what you were talking about? Where is Mamma gone?”

“She’s gone —” Nurse’s brief authority suddenly deserted her, and she dwindled into the ordinary domestic. Unconsciously her voice took the tone she used to her mistress. “She has run away with Major Maude,” she said, stopping neither to explain nor soften her words.

The Brownie looked round the ring of faces. God alone knew what insight came into her childish mind to unravel the meaning of that “gone for ever — gone with Major Maude,” but after a second she turned away with mingled pride and despair in her small face.

“Where is my father?” she said quietly. At least that much she comprehended, that they were left alone together.

“In the dining-room, Miss. But —” It was one of the housemaids who tried to interpose.

“Let me go, please,” said the child simply; and as they drew back, instinctively recognising a stronger will, she walked past them and out of the nursery for ever. An invisible barrier fell before her as she took her freedom in her own hands, and the limits of her childhood seemed to be left behind upon that upper landing. The Brownie’s years only numbered



“THERE WAS A LONG SILENCE.”

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eight, but she was a woman in authority as she went slowly down the staircase and straight on to the dining-room.

The blinds were not drawn; a great bowl of flowers stood on the table bathed in the flaccid August sunshine; everything was as usual. There was nothing to suggest that a tragedy had taken place, unless it were that stooping figure in the arm-chair by the fireplace. There was more than age there, and yet the sight of it brought the Duke's motto to the Brownie's remembrance — she could not have told why — “*Flecti, non frangi*”; it came to her like a pang of hope.

She went across the room lightly — her step had not the patter of most children's — and drawing her father's hands away from his face, she climbed on to his knee and put her arms round his neck. And then there was a long silence while the man laid his grey head down against the child's breast, as if their positions were reversed and it was her place to guard and succour.

The Brownie thought she must have been there quite ten minutes before she noticed Master Pinnock. She supposed he had followed her out of the

nursery and downstairs, for anyhow there he was, rubbing his head in his own particular fashion against his master's foot. Sir Charles—he was Lord Chateris now—had not known that he possessed a cat amongst his household, and possibly yesterday he would not have demurred if an edict had gone forth and one of the servants had promptly removed the intruder out of the room. But yesterday and to-day had been divided by a great gulf, and Master Pinnock had come to stay. He took to the alien atmosphere of the dining-room with his customary placidity, and stretching himself out before the empty grate, dreamed of the big fires which would blaze there in the winter. Half an hour afterwards the butler ventured to enter, and catching sight of the unusual spectacle was going to turn Master Pinnock out of the room with scant ceremony. The Brownie made an instinctive movement—it was not pronounced authority yet, but it was protest.

“Leave the cat alone,” Lord Chateris said, comprehending her. Then he caught sight of Nurse's face peering over the butler's shoulder; she had come in search of her charge out of custom. Her

lips framed the words "Shall I" — without saying them.

"You can both of you go," Lord Chateris said quietly. He also was master in his own house at last. "Lady Hero will stay."



"HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF NURSE'S FACE."

As the servants left the room, and she tightened her clasp again round her father's neck, the Brownie wondered for a second whom he meant.

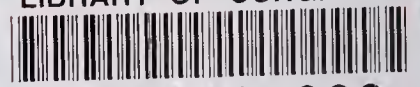
THE END.



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